

A skills and needs analysis among social workers assessing alleged child sexual abuse
in the Western Cape

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this article to:

My husband Luston David Jacobs

You have given me your unconditional Love, support, encouragement
And companionship
Through this journey in my life,
I am truly blessed...

I will always be thankful.

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- My Heavenly Father, for his grace, guidance and spiritual upliftment and strength throughout my journey
- My husband Luston Jacobs for his patience support and unconditional love. Luston you are my anchor and I thank you for your unwavering belief in me.
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DECLARATION

I, Roche Iffley, declare herewith that the dissertation entitled “A skills and needs analysis among social workers assessing alleged child sexual abuse in the Western Cape”, which I herewith submit to the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, is my own work and that all references used or quoted are indicated and acknowledge.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

SUMMARY

Key terms: skills, needs, social work, forensic social workers, alleged child sexual abuse, Western Cape, questionnaire, survey, quantitative research.

This study focuses on the skills and needs of forensic social workers, working with alleged child sexual abuse in the Western Cape. Forensic social work is based on specialised knowledge drawn from established principles and their application within proven methodology of training, familiarity with the law, evaluation and objective criteria associated with treatment outcomes. The scope of forensic social work thus includes a specialised skill where human service systems communicate the language in the context of legal systems. This means that the forensic process must withstand critical review and rebuttal from opposing parties in a legal system.

It is evident that a forensic social worker needs to have specialised training and specific skills, focusing on forensic investigative interviews, all aspects of child sexual abuse and how the South African justice system operates. Without these skills, the legal process may not be successful and the prevention of child sexual abuse not as successful as it might otherwise be.

The general aim of the study was to analyse the skills and needs of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse in order to assist organisations working in the field of forensic social work by improving their support training practices in forensic social work.

The researcher used a quantitative descriptive design also known as a survey design. This design usually makes use of a questionnaire as a data collection method and nineteen (19) respondents were selected according to a randomised method of sampling. The findings form part of a list of recommendations to participating welfare organisations.

OPSOMMING

Sleuteltermes: Vaardighede, behoeftes, maatskaplike werk, forensiese maatskaplike werkers, beweerde seksuele misbruik, Wes-Kaap, vraelys, opname, kwantitatiewe navorsing.

Hierdie studie fokus op die vaardighede en behoeftes van die forensiese maatskaplike werker, wat met gevalle van beweerde seksuele misbruik in die Wes-Kaap werk. Forensiese maatskaplike werk is op gespesialiseerde kennis gebaseer wat op gevestigde beginsels gegrond is en die toepassing daarvan in 'n beproefde opleidingsmetode. Die werkterrein is vertroutheid met die wet, benutting, evaluering en objektiewe benutting van kriteria wat met die behandeling-uitkomst van die werkterrein verband hou. Die omvang van die forensiese maatskaplike werk sluit dus 'n gespesialiseerde vaardigheid in waar hulpverlening binne die konteks van die reg geskied. Dit beteken dus dat die forensiese proses 'n kritiese oorsig en die weerleggings van die strydende partye in 'n regstelsel sal moet kan weerstaan.

Dit is duidelik dat 'n maatskaplike werker wat in die forensiese veld werk, oor gespesialiseerde opleiding en spesifieke vaardighede moet beskik wat 'n fokus op die forensiese ondersoek, onderhoudsvoering en alle aspekte van seksuele misbruik, asook die wyse waarop die Suid-Afrikaanse regstelsel werk, insluit. Sonder hierdie kennis kan die regsproses nie nawense verloop en die voorkoming van seksuele misbruik nie suksesvol uitgevoer word nie. Die algemene doel van die studie is om die vaardighede en behoeftes waarvoor maatskaplike werkers beskik, te ontleed. Die maatskaplike werkers wat hier ter sprake is, is diegene wat teen die agtergrond van forensiese werk bewerings van seksuele misbruik teen kinders moet ondersoek. Verder moes daar aan organisasies wat in die veld van forensiese maatskaplike werk werksaam en/of behulpsaam is, die nodige riglyne gebied word. Dit sou die verbetering van hulle ondersteuning en ook van opleidingspraktyke in forensiese maatskaplike werk tot gevolg hê.

Die navorser het gebruik gemaak van 'n kwantitatiewe beskrywende ontwerp ook bekend as 'n "opname-ontwerp" Hierdie ontwerp maak gewoonlik gebruik van 'n vraelys as data-insamelingsmetode en negentien (19) respondente is op grond van 'n ewekansige steekproefmetode geselekteer. Die bevindings vorm deel van 'n lys aanbevelings aan die betrokke deelnemende welsynsorganisasies.

A skills and needs analysis among social workers assessing alleged child sexual abuse in the Western Cape

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The researcher is a forensic social worker in the Western Cape working in the field of child sexual abuse. In South African society, awareness of sexual abuse of children and adolescents varies greatly among members of the public and professionals in view of media coverage of cases such as the following:

Vergewe my...ek is jammer... (Burger, 2012-09-19) Johannes Jacobus Steyn (die sogenaamde Sondagverkrachter) is vyf lewenslange vonnisse opgelê en tot 'n addisionele 170 jaar tronkstraf in die hooggeregshofsitting in Alberton gevonniss vir 33 aanklagte van verkragting, seksuele aanranding, ontvoering en moord van meisies onder die ouderdom van vyftien.

System fails rape victim (Sunday Times, 2012-10-22) In the Northern Cape, a 10-year-old girl who has been raped by her mother's boyfriend was moved to a place of safety. Police then had to deal with another shocking allegation – that her 15-year-old brother and his friends, aged 11 and 12 had also raped her.

Call for life-term for dance teacher (Acer, 2012-10-30) The state wants a Cape Town dance teacher to get a heavy sentence for raping seven girls, the national Prosecuting Authority (NPA) said yesterday.

City pupil in gang-rape video (Dama, 2012-10-24) While a video showing the gang rape of a 14-year-old Khayelitsha girl has been circulating among pupils, a group of girls have threatened to stab her for reporting it to the police.

Man kry 60 j vir verkragting en moord (Nel, 2012-06-06) 'n Man is gister tot 60 jaar tronkstraf gevonniss weens die verkragting van en moord op 'n agtjarige familielid verlede

jaar. Die lyk van Zikona Qhayi is op 11 Oktober verlede jaar in die bosse sowat 800 m van haar ouerhuis in Harare gevind.

Skool bekyk verkragting by nasorg (Roberts, 2012-07-31) 'n Beweerde verkragting by die laerskool Brackenfell is verlede Vrydag aanhandig gemaak. Daar word beweer dat 'n vyfjarige kind na bewering by die skool verkrag is. Volgens berigte word 'n 12-jarige seun by die skool verdink. 'n Maatskaplike werker werk tans met die kind om te probeer vasstel wat gebeur het. Die polisie se eenheid teen gesinsgeweld, kindermishandeling en seksuele misdrywe in Kraaifontein ondersoek die saak.

For the purpose of this study, the social worker assessing alleged child sexual abuse will be referred to as a forensic social worker or, alternatively, a social worker operating in the field of forensic practice. Furthermore, this research will focus on child sexual abuse as part of forensic social work, forensic practice or forensic investigation. The researcher is aware of the fact that forensic social work entails more than just the assessment of alleged child sexual abuse. This will be discussed later in this research report.

The reality related to sexual abuse of children and adolescents has a profound impact on the skills and training needs of social workers in this field. A social worker employed in an environment where sexual abuse is investigated may therefore require expertise and skills directed at this process. In practice, this field of expertise refers to forensic social work. According to the American College of Forensic Examiners Institute (ACFEI, 2012), forensic social work is the application of social work to issues relating to the law and legal system, both civil and criminal. By completing training in forensic social work, social workers may demonstrate specialised skills and competency that complement their work in this field.

According to the National Organisation of Forensic Social Work (2011), a broader definition of forensic social work includes child custody issues involving, *inter alia*, divorce, neglect, termination of parental rights, the implications of child and spouse abuse, juvenile and adult justice services, corrections, and mandated treatment.

Barker and Branson (2002:5) describe forensic social work as a professional field in social work focusing on the interface between societies' legal and human service

systems. This implies the provision of expert testimony in a court of law, investigating cases of possible criminal conduct and assisting the legal system in such issues as child sexual abuse.

From the above opinion, it is clear that the social worker operating in the field of legal and criminal conduct needs specialised knowledge drawn from established principles and their application within proven methodology of training, familiarity with the law, evaluation and objective criteria associated with treatment outcomes.

At this stage, the Scope of Practice for Social Work (SACSSP: 2012) does not make provision for forensic social work as an autonomous registration category with SACSSP (the South African Council for Social Services Professions). It therefore does not distinguish between prescribed skills for social workers assessing alleged child sexual abuse, but only refers to casework, case management, group work, community work and social work research as obtained through the basic training in the BSW (Bachelor of Social Work) degree. Organisations and social workers therefore need to accept responsibility for training practices in order to obtain specialised skills in forensic practice, acquired where human service systems communicate the language in the context of legal systems. This means that the forensic process in social work practice must withstand critical review and rebuttal from opposing parties in a legal system and must make provision for social workers to acquire skills and competencies to implement this process.

According to Scheepers (2008:19), social workers operating in this field also engage in assessing and making recommendations about reported child sexual abuse, children's interests, incapacities or inability to testify in a court of law and serving as an expert witness in allegations of child sexual abuse. From the registered Programme Qualification Mix available for Social Work in South Africa, the training of social workers traditionally did not include familiarity with this adversary process, nor do the issues that civil and criminal justice systems confront reflect in training for social workers (SAQA, 2011). Without such training, social workers called on to provide forensic services may find themselves at a disadvantage. The reality of the South African social work context is that specialised training for these services is often lacking. Social workers are often

employed in forensic social work positions with a basic professional four-year bachelor's degree and statutory registration as prerequisite. The term forensic social worker is thus not a true reflection of expertise and most of the time reflects the job description of the position in which the social worker is employed.

According to an official media statement made by Frikkie Kotzé (NWU: 2010), the increase in child abuse cases in South Africa has made increasing demands on social workers who are often called upon to give expert testimony in courts. Furthermore, supportive to this statement, Scheepers (2008:31) argues that specialist training in "forensic social work" has been expressed by courts in South Africa. In one of her recommendations, she states:

"Kriteria moet saamgestel word waaraan 'n maatskaplike werker moet voldoen alvorens sy/hy kan registreer by die Suid-Afrikaanse Raad vir Maatskaplike Diensberoepe as 'n forensiese maatskaplike werker" (Scheepers, 2008:31).

The Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University is currently the only University in the country that offers an MSW (a Master's degree in social work) in forensic practice, equipping social workers with specific competencies in this field of expertise.

The demand for specialised training does not only exist in the field of higher education. Crimes against children have been declared a priority focus by the South African Police Services' National Commissioner and therefore a special focus on forensic social work has been adopted by Police Social Work Services (SAPS) (National Work Protocol: SAPS Forensic Social Work Procedure Manual, 2006:3). As a result of this SAPS protocol, twenty-seven social workers were appointed in 2007 within SAPS (Western Cape) and stationed at specialised units called the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Units to assist with assessing allegations of sexual offences against children. Only one of these social workers completed formal MSW training in forensic social work practice.

It is stated in the National Protocol for forensic social workers in the South African Police Service (2006) that the primary functions of social workers operating in the forensic field is to specifically assess allegations of child sexual abuse, compile court reports and provide expert testimony. A member of SAPS is to conduct investigative interviews with children, after which a decision is to be made to see whether the statement contains sufficient information (Spies, 2006:206) to prosecute.

Stutterheim and Weyers (1999:16) say that the core function of social workers working in a forensic environment is to assess allegations of child sexual abuse, including the extraction of statements from children by means of forensic investigative interviews and to present the facts to court. According to Muller (2001:18), there is a difference between social work where intervention and support is given and social work in the forensic domain. She mentions that clinical interviews provide clients with treatment whereas forensic interviews are conducted to determine the facts of the alleged incident under investigation.

From a study of the above authors, it is evident that social workers in the forensic field need to have specialised training and specific skills, focusing on forensic investigative interviews, all aspects of child sexual abuse and on the way that the South African justice system operates. Without these skills, social workers sometimes fear that the legal process may not be successful and the prevention of child sexual abuse therefore not as successful as it ought to be.

The researcher has studied the court files of social workers working in the forensic field where cases have been withdrawn from court due to insufficient evidence for prosecution. The files reflect the fact that from January till June 2009, approximately 28 cases of all the withdrawn court files were withdrawn in court due to amongst other factors, insufficient facts and incomplete statements from the victims. In interviews with state prosecutors of the Strand Magistrate Court (Van Heerden and September), only approximately 25% of cases involving preschool children succeed in making it to court due to one of the reasons being insufficient information and incomplete statements of children. Grobbelaar, a senior State Prosecutor of the Somerset West Magistrate's

Court (2010) confirms this by adding that, although there are various reasons why cases are withdrawn in court, one of them is, however, due either to insufficient information and facts or the statements not being in the child's own words.

From the above, it is clear that social workers working in the forensic field need to be equipped in such a way that sufficient and relevant information is gathered to ensure successful prosecution in a court of law. It is the task of the social worker in this environment to assist the court in obtaining sufficient and complete information in order to have a successful conviction of every perpetrator. The skills and training of these social workers need to be expanded and improved to assure more successful prosecution in court.

To summarise, the following can be regarded as relevant to the problem at hand:

- Social workers appointed as forensic experts and working with allegations of child sexual abuse might benefit from more focused training in the field of forensic practice. This is evident from cases that are withdrawn in court and feedback from social workers in the field.
- Cases of child sexual abuse are being thrown out in court due to insufficient information and incomplete statements that result in a poor conviction rate of perpetrators.
- No empirical research has been done specifically in the Western Cape to investigate the actual extent and nature of the training of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse.
- The skills and needs with regards to specific training of social workers in the field of child sexual abuse and forensic work are thus unknown even though the pitfalls and problems with current training practices, scope of practice and lack of experience are known.
- Social workers receive basic training and attend courses to implement protocols as adopted by different organisations, but acquire no real skills in the sense of what is truly needed to facilitate the role of the social worker in the forensic field. These social workers *per se*, although employed in forensic environments, apparently lack adequate training to be called specialists in forensic practice,

leaving them vulnerable and unequipped to do their job. If they actually are trained, what does the training consist of and do the social workers feel adequately equipped to do social work in a forensic environment as stipulated?

In view of the above, the following research question needs to be answered:

What are the skills and needs among social workers assessing alleged child sexual abuse in the Western Cape in order to engage in forensic activities within their areas of competence and expertise?

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

An aim is the same as a goal, which Fouché and De Vos (2011:94) describe as “the end toward which effort or ambition is directed”.

1.3.1 General aim

To analyse the skills and professional needs of social workers operating in the field of forensic practice with a view to future training and professional development practices in their organisations.

1.3.2 Objectives

According to Fouché and De Vos (2011:94), an objective can be defined as a practical step taken to achieve your stated aim in research. The objectives for this research are as follows:

- To undertake an in-depth literature study to explore the theoretical aspects of the field of forensic social work with emphasis on child sexual abuse;
- To conduct an empirical study by collecting evidence through a self-constructed questionnaire that reflects the skills and professional needs required for training in the particular field;
- To analyse and describe the data gathered after proper data analysis; and

- To draw conclusions and formulate recommendations to assist those in the social work environment (welfare organisations, social workers and higher education institutions) in supporting training and professional development in the field of forensic practice.

1.4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

If more information with regard to experience, content, needs and working methodology for social workers operating in a forensic environment should form part of training, training practices in welfare organisations can be directed towards equipping said social workers in the forensic field to engage in practices that may lead to a higher success rate of cases going to court, and ultimately to the conviction of perpetrators in child sexual abuse cases.

1.5 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The research procedure consisted of four basis steps, namely:

1.5.1 Analysis of available literature

A comprehensive literature study was conducted as part of the study. Literature gathered from books, journal articles and available completed research on the topic were used in the conceptual framework needed for questionnaire construction and theoretical underpinnings:

- Background of forensic social work with an emphasis on the work of Barker and Branson (2001-2010)
- The Forensic Evaluation Model with an emphasis on the work of Connie Nicholas Carnes and Charles Wilson from the National Children's Advocacy Centre and Debra Nelson-Gardell from the University of Alabama (2005-2010)
- The functions of forensic social work, helping strategies in child sexual abuse in South African context (Wessels, 2009; Matthias, 2011; Strydom, 2010; and Dunn,2005-2011)

- Skills of the professional working in the child sexual abuse environment (Kuehnle and Connell, 2009; and Goicoechea, 2011).

Pilot study

The next phase in the research was the pilot study. This entailed the development of the questionnaire, the evaluation by experts and finally the pilot testing. The questionnaire was tested on six respondents (colleagues at the researcher's office (not included in the main study). The idea was to ascertain whether the questions were clearly understood by others.

1.5.2 Main study (empirical investigation)

In the main study, nineteen social workers were asked to complete the questionnaire (not part of the pilot study). The results of the questionnaire were duly analysed and interpreted.

1.5.2.1 The research design

Grinnell (2001:547) describes a research design as a plan that includes every aspect of a proposed research study from the conceptualisation of the problem right through to the dissemination of the findings. This study used a quantitative descriptive survey design, using a self-constructed questionnaire with social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse in the Western Cape (Fouche & De Vos, 2011:137; Durrheim, 2006:45). The research resides in the Western Cape and works within the framework of the SAPS Western Cape regional boundaries. The rationale for this sampling will be discussed later in the report. The goal was to present a uniform stimulus to respondents in order to compare their responses and then to do the proposed analysis as indicated in the goal.

The research is an applied study through which empirical evidence of the nature and extent of the skills and training needs of social workers may cast light on how the social

welfare organisations utilising these social workers can be more successful in sexual abuse convictions (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006:45; Durrheim, 2006:45). The nature of the research is both explorative and descriptive (Babbie & Mouton, 2004:80; Fouche & De Vos, 2011:96).

In order to analyse the needs and skills of social workers (specifically in the forensic practice domain), the status quo of current affairs is necessary, therefore questionnaires delivered by hand were used. The motivation for this decision can be found in the following:

- The researcher is an objective observer with limited involvement regarding what is required in order to obtain the necessary data;
- The collection of data occurs in a standardised manner, for example all participants answer the same questionnaire;
- The researcher only obtains specific data and does not add her own interpretations;
- The measurement of data is focused on specific variables obtained from the conceptual framework of what forensic social work ought to be according to the scope of practice of social workers and definitions.

The following framework according to Creswell (2007) explains the paradigmatic assumptions for the study:

View	Ontological assumption	Epistemological assumption	Axiological assumption	Methodological assumption	Rhetorical Assumption	
Research paradigm	Nature of reality	Relationship of researcher	Role of Values	Process of research	Language of research	Purpose
Quantitative	Objective, apart from researcher	Researcher is independent from what is being researched	Value free and values are emotive and therefore outside the scientific inquiry	Deductive process; cause and effect context free	Formal, based on set definitions; impersonal voice	To explain and predict

The completion of the research report

1.5.2.2 Method of obtaining results

This researcher used a quantitative descriptive design also known as a survey design. This design usually makes use of a questionnaire as a data collection method and respondents are ideally selected according to a randomised method of sampling. For the purpose of this quantitative descriptive design, a randomised cross-sectional survey was used. According to Hopkins (2011:45), in cross-sectional studies variables of interest in a sample of subjects are assayed once and the relationships between them are determined. This refers to the central concept of the study and the way in which the concepts are operationalized in practical and measurable components (Delpont & Roestenburg, 2011:190). In this study, the sample of subjects comprised forensic social work, training, skills, needs and sexual abuse constructed in a questionnaire.

1.5.2.3 Respondents

To generalise from the sample to the population, the sample has to be representative of said population. This process known as sampling is defined by Strydom and Delpont (2011:390) as a way of representing a portion of a population and/or universe as representative of the selected population or universe. In this study, the universe refers to all social workers working in the Western Cape and who have been deployed in an organisational structure where social work with forensic practice is employed and where specifically child sexual abuse is common. Nonprobability sampling was applied with purposeful selection, as recommended by Babbie (2008:52), Maree and Pietersen (2010:176) and Strydom (2011b:231).

The population (Strydom, 2011b:223) within the universe was confined to the selected social workers who operate in social work in forensic practice and

specifically in the field of child sexual abuse. The total population in the Western Cape (within four welfare organisations) was 55. Twenty-seven (27) completed questionnaires in this study to represent an accurate scope of the skills and needs, six were used in the pilot study and nineteen completed the main study. The total population represented four welfare organisations working specifically in the field of social work forensic practice as predominant criterion.

1.5.4.4 Measuring instruments

As part of the research, it was the intention of the researcher to make use of a self-constructed questionnaire specifically designed to identify the skills and needs necessary for training. According to Zaaiman (2003:37), a questionnaire is the most common method of data collection in quantitative research. The researcher compiled the questionnaires in English only, as this represents the language medium used in welfare organisations and among social workers in the Western Cape included in this research.

A pre-test questionnaire was used in order to discover unanticipated problems as part of the pilot study. In the pre-testing, all aspects of the total data-collection process are reflected on small scale. According to Strydom (2011:237), probability does not play a major role and the reason for the pilot study must take all heterogeneous factors into consideration. A pre-test is used to determine errors in measurement. The findings of this pre-test in the pilot study are not taken into account in the main study.

1.5.2.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is defined by Fossey, Harvey and McDermott (2002:728) as the process of reviewing, interpreting and summarising data with the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomenon. The questionnaires were analysed manually by means of a univariate (single) analysis that included descriptive statistics with important information regarding the variables used.

Mean, median, and mode measure central tendency of a variable were used. This gave the researcher information in order to draw histograms, distribution graphs and box plots to see how a variable was distributed. The analysed data were presented in tabular and graphical display form with frequency distributions and graphic presentation for easy interpretation.

1.5.2.6 Ethical aspects

According to Strydom (2011c:114), the ethical responsibility of the researcher applies to all research. Ethical approval with an appropriate ethical reference number for this study was received from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University.

The following ethical measures were applied:

- **Autonomy and confidentiality:** All participants were respected by means of an informed consent form. Informed and voluntary consent was obtained and participants were assured of their freedom not to complete the questionnaire for the research. No names or any identifiable information was required in the questionnaire.
- **Actions and competence of the researcher:** Researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation. The researcher has been employed by the South African Police Service for more than 10 years. She investigates allegations of child sexual abuse issues lodged in courts in the Western Cape. The researcher is up to date with recent literature on the topic and familiar with research methodology. The researcher received supervision on a monthly basis.
- **Release and publication of the findings:** Research participants will ultimately be informed of the findings of the study in an objective and responsible manner after the completion of the study.
- **The researcher is a registered social worker with the South African Council for Social Services Professions and although no specific**

ethical code for social work research exists in South Africa, the code of conduct for social workers is binding for this research process. This research project forms part of an ethical application at the subject group social work under the project management of Prof Pedro Rankin (ethics number: 2011-2015) and was approved in 2011.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study were as follows:

- Limited literature on the specialised field of forensic social work: despite numerous research projects done at the subject group Social Work at North West University, a basic theoretical underpinning of this specialised field is yet lacking.
- A lack regarding a formal scope of practice for forensic social workers as stipulated by the professional board for social work in South Africa, making this research relative in the sense of research boundaries when it comes to respondents.
- A further limitation of this study was the small sample size. A small sample size may produce false positive results, or it may overestimate the magnitude of an association. It was therefore important not to draw overly strong conclusions about a risk factor or trial intervention whenever the researcher analysed results. Rather, data from this study may be used to design confirmatory studies of a more comprehensive format.
- The results are limited, since they provide numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative. Semi-constructed interviews as follow-up may give a more comprehensive description of the reality in a confirmation study. The major goal of this study, however, was to conduct a survey and not a detailed explanation of what perhaps was wrong or right in practice.
- The researcher might miss out on phenomena occurring because of the focus on

theory or hypothesis testing rather than on theory or hypothesis generation (called the confirmation bias).

1.7 REPORT LAYOUT

Chapter 1 intends to serve as an introduction to the research report. Here the researcher outlines all the relevant aspects of the research process that was followed.

In Chapter 2, the researcher intended to gain insight into the background in view of the qualifications of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse, their role, needs and required training skills.

Chapter 3 aims to present the research methodology utilised in the study, which is quantitative. In this chapter, the survey, which intends to be used to gather data, is discussed. The empirical findings are also discussed.

Chapter 4 consists of conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

AN EXPLORATION OF THE FIELD OF FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In order to understand the needs and skills of social workers operating in the forensic field, it is important to map the evolution of forensic social work in South Africa with a minor focus on its international origins. In this chapter, forensic social work will be discussed in terms of how it developed as a specialised field and what the future possibilities may be.

Although it is not recognised in South Africa as a specialty field in social work, forensic social work as a specialist field was conceptualised in the United States of America (USA) only in the early 1980s (Hughes et al, in Weyers, 2001:1).

The forensic social work field has been expanding as social workers have become more and more involved in matters relating to the criminal justice system. The California State University is preparing students for this kind of work by concentrating on the forensic field in their curriculum (Roberts and Brownell, 1999:363). According to this document, forensic social work includes family court assessments as well as assessments for psychiatric hospitals and aftercare.

According to Barker and Branson (2002), forensic social workers in the United Kingdom (U.K) are placed in various settings, including specialised hospitals such as psychiatric hospitals. The duties of social workers in the forensic field involve applications for hospital admission, assessments, supervision regarding the discharged patients and risk assessment. They are also required to provide social care support.

In South Africa, Scheepers (2008:17) argues that the historical background of statutory and forensic social work should be taken into consideration. She states the

following:

“It is evident that social workers have remained an enduring and dynamic force working for the betterment of individuals, families and communities. This includes the improvement of social conditions and legal protection for often neglected populations, such as children who are victims of assault.”

According to her, forensic social work includes a specialised field of social work practice that is characterised by the social worker’s primary function of providing expert testimony in courts of law.

In South Africa, social workers have started rendering services pertaining to children’s court proceedings from as early as the 1930s. These social workers described their work involvement as “statutory social work” and subsequently moved toward the concept “legal social work” (Barker and Branson, 2002:71). According to Weyers (2001:1), the correlation between social work, the legal profession and the court is not something new, but can be traced back to the very beginning of the social work profession.

In the South African context, the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP 2011) adapted an integrative definition consistent with international definitions. South African standards define forensic social work broadly as a subspecialty of social work that applies an integrative approach to social work practice with diverse populations impacted by legal issues both civil and/or criminal. Supportive of this statement, Maschi and Killian (2011:12) argue that forensic social work combines social work and specialised legal and policy skills to target social functioning and socio-legal conditions. The use of the term *forensic* underscores the infusion of social justice and human rights principles.

These authors argue that the term forensic also underscores the collaborative nature of effective forensic social work, which includes collaboration with clients, professionals, and other stakeholders within and across formal and informal systems. It is evident that effective forensic social work needs to integrate the well-being of clients as well as the justice system in order to balance psychosocial wellbeing. This

implicates that social workers in the forensic field intervene with individuals on a personal as well as on a legal level, such as representing a youth in court or participating in lobbying efforts to advocate for legislation that addresses the rights of people. However, at first glance it is apparent that this does not currently reflect the reality in South Africa. The conceptualisation of the social justice system and the role of the social worker in it need to be clarified – especially in other domains where forensic practices as part of social work are prominent, as in the South African Police Service (SAPS).

2.2 FORENSIC PRACTICE AS PART OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE (SAPS)

The initiative for the creation of a specialised forensic social work service to assist in cases of child sexual abuse was taken after the results of a research project conducted by social work students at the North West University in Potchefstroom. Two conclusions came to fore, namely the fact that there was a need for a specialised social work service to assist the Child Protection Units of the SAPS with child sexual abuse cases, and secondly that social workers needed specialised training in order to function effectively as expert witnesses in cases of child sexual abuse (Stutterheim & Weyers, 1999:17).

The Police Social Work Services (PSWS) established a forensic social work service on 6 May 1997 and it became operational in November 1997. The aim of this service was to assist in the investigation of cases of child sexual abuse and to provide expert evidence in court (Stutterheim & Weyers, 1999:16). Twenty-two police social workers underwent special training from March to September 1997 and were stationed throughout South Africa.

The driving force behind the establishment was due to a sharp rise in cases of child sexual abuse and a shortfall of skilled social workers to address the need for successful prosecutions in courts of law. Expanding this service became a matter of urgency only at the beginning of 2007 after SAPS in strategic planning realised that

existing training does not prepare the social worker for effective services to the courts and that the appointment of social workers in a special forensic unit may lead to more success in prosecutions. In April 2007, twenty-seven forensic social workers were employed throughout the Western Cape to assist at the various FCS Units. This process did not precede a conceptualisation of the field and scope of practice, but was born out of need at grass-roots level. Contemporary social work entails practice in a social environment, one which has been described as including conditions, circumstances and human interactions. Yet, in both theory and in practice, the justice environment is equally real for social workers who often address issues of law and policy, fairness, equity and protection – especially in the field of sexual abuse (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2009:47).

The National Work Protocol Procedure Manual for the SAPS Forensic Social Work Unit (2006:7) states that the forensic evaluator needs to develop an underlying assumption that allegations of child sexual abuse are complex and therefore require investigation of multiple sources of information. This was the forerunner for the implementation of a comprehensive model utilised by the SAPS forensic evaluators when conducting any forensic evaluation. The point of departure was that obtaining collateral information from various sources such as teachers, parents, friends and other professionals involved is important and thus highlighted by this model (National Work Protocol Procedure Manual: SAPS Forensic Social Work, 2006:7). From this a forensic evaluation model was developed for SAPS to standardise a process by which forensically trained social workers can assist in fact-finding when investigators would otherwise have to close a case owing to a lack of a credible statement from the child.

Although implemented, the application of the forensic evaluation model in the SAPS needs to be evaluated for effectiveness and must be regarded as being merely in its developmental phase. This model also assumes that the social worker is already equipped and has had specialised training with regard to all aspects of forensic work, which is not the case.

From research done by Scheepers (2008:15), it appears that only 3,04% of forensic social workers have actually had specialised training in this field, with more than 50% having had only the minimum qualification to practise – that is an honours degree in social work. Less than 1% of all forensic social workers have a master's degree in forensic practice. From these statistics, it is evident that a specialised intervention such as the application of a forensic evaluation model – where specialised training is a requirement – has not materialised in practice.

In theory, however, the question remains: what do social workers actually need in order to be adequately equipped to enter the field of forensic practice? Barker and Branson (2002:8-10), identify ten functions of forensic social work within the American legal and social work context and stated that if applied to South African circumstances, the following five functions would be applicable:

- To provide expert testimony of assessments that are based on investigation of persons involved – to courts of law or to legal authorities
- To provide expert testimony that is not based on the investigation of persons involved – to courts of law
- To provide expert testimony in administrative enquiries and civil proceedings
- To make recommendations to courts of law regarding appropriate sentences
- To make recommendations to courts of law regarding appropriate court orders.

Forensic social work history suggests that the most effective efforts were evident when individual and social level action converged. In the 21st century, the mission of forensic social work involves equipping practitioners with a collective vision as well as with the required knowledge and skills to effectively navigate the legal system. The potential for the immediate and distant future of forensic social workers is one of high anticipation. The question that comes to mind, however, is what the convergence of individual and social level skills will look like. How can forensic social workers be trained and equipped to address the needs of the environment in which they work? A starting point would be to illustrate the difference between the two separate working domains in social work, namely the role of therapeutic intervention and the role of forensic and statutory practitioner.

2.3 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THERAPEUTIC AND FORENSIC DOMAINS IN SOCIAL WORK

In a clinical or therapeutic process, the aim is to render service to the client, whereas in a forensic or investigative process, the practitioner aims to obtain facts of a particular incident under investigation (Muller, 2001:8). The difference between clinical or therapeutic and forensic interviews is further outlined by Kuehnlé and Connell (2009:32) in the following table:

Table 1: Difference between clinical and forensic interviews

Role	Traditional social work role	Forensic social work
Ultimate Client	Child and child's parents	Judicial system
Goal	Understanding the child's psychological state	Obtaining uncontaminated data
Role of professional	Advocate	Fact finder
Stance	Pro-child	Neutrality
Assumptions	Trustworthiness of the child	Existence of multiple hypotheses
Techniques	Therapeutic	Legally defensible

Pipe, Lamb, Orbach and Cederborg (2007:222) add to what Muller stated above and mention that the purpose of conducting a forensic interview is to determine whether legal action should be taken, by collecting facts to support or dispute an allegation by providing an opportunity for children to report as much information as they possibly can. These authors further explain that a forensic interviewer is a fact finder and only collects information that is relevant to the legal process. Forensic interviewers may

identify symptoms requiring treatment through observing the client and may, however, not provide the therapeutic observation to the client involved, whereas the goals of clinical interviews are to diagnose, treat and plan in order to reduce symptoms (Pipe, et al, 2007:222-223). Authors such as Roos and Voster (2003:31) inform us that therapeutic conversation attempts to improve an individual's well-being, while a forensic interview is aimed at gathering relevant forensic information. Furniss (1991:204) refers to forensic interviewing as legal interviewing and confirms that its aim is to obtain objective information that is relevant for child protective agencies such as the courts.

According to Maschi and Killian (2011:13), effective forensic social work requires an integrated yet two-pronged approach that addresses wellbeing (psycho-social) and justice (law and policy) to help individuals, families and communities. This type of integrated and two-pronged approach to practice will demand an emphasis on forensic practice where integrating knowledge and skills in policy and practice, surrounding forensic or legal issues, interdisciplinary collaboration, case management, and specialised areas of social work, such as clinical and community practice, are combined. The authors further suggest that forensic social workers should use a type of double vision to examine the interaction between individuals and their environment. Because social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and recourses, a forensic social worker might apply a two-pronged approach to practice by providing clients with both ends of the spectrum.

It is evident from the work of McCashen (2005:71) that social work has adopted a strengths-based approach to social work. This approach is based on the perspective that everything the social worker does is intended to help clients to discover and explore their strengths in order for them to achieve their goals (Van Wormer, Wells & Boes, 2000:178). According to Miley, et al (2001:448), the nature of strengths is defined as "...personal abilities, resourcefulness, and creativity, as well as resources in interpersonal relationships, culture, organizational networks, and community connections". However, the question that arises, is whether the forensic social worker, working from a strength-based approach, is adequately equipped/trained to

deal with the legal environment that forms part of the working domain of said forensic social worker. Maschi and Killian (2011:25) argue that a forensic social worker should use a type of double vision to examine the interaction between the individuals (clients) and their environment (legal system). These social workers might best be served by looking beyond mono-system thinking and practices (traditional social work training) and focusing on a bi-system approach where transdisciplinary exposure will equip them to be able to work in the forensic domain. This will require special skills and competencies in specialised training on two levels, namely (a) the field of child sexual abuse and (b) the legal domain.

2.4 SKILLS OF THE FORENSIC SOCIAL WORKER OPERATING IN THE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ENVIRONMENT OR FIELD

It is evident from the above discussion of the skills and competencies required for forensic social work, that the social worker must, according to Springer and Roberts (2007:124), also have skills and competencies to be able to assess the interaction of individual, family, and environmental factors within the domain of forensic practice. These skills and competencies are necessary in order to identify aspects that contribute to sexual abuse. In addition, they identify strengths that will both preserve the family and protect the child.

According to Herman (2010:189), clinical evaluations in order to determine whether a child was sexually abused and whether sexual abuse actually occurred, as well as the identity of the perpetrator, are focused on making diagnoses of psycho-social problems and recommending appropriate interventions. This implies a dual role: on the one hand, one of forensic intervention, and on the other hand, one of therapeutic intervention. The most important aspect regarding the dual role of the forensic social worker is to acquire skills to use and interpret evidence in two broad categories, namely psycho-social evidence and non-psychosocial evidence. Herman (2010:200) also states that the term non-psychosocial evidence refers to evidence that is not essentially psycho-social in nature and evidence that would not ordinarily be collected by or require interpretation by a medical practitioner. Non-psychological evidence

includes medical findings, photographs or videos, other psychical evidence and suspects' confessions.

Kuehnle and Connell (2009:83) mention several questions that forensic social workers should ask themselves before agreeing to take on a child sexual abuse evaluation. The evaluation could be conducted in the light of the following questions and may have direct links with the way a social worker deals with the psycho-social evidence in a case:

- Do I have the necessary educational background and experience to competently conduct such an assessment?
- Do I have the best scientifically based knowledge necessary to conduct a child sexual abuse evaluation in general?
- Do the assessment tools that I plan to use meet all the appropriate standards?
- Do I need specialised knowledge, data or assistance to work competently on a certain case?
- Do I have at my disposal sufficient knowledge of the law, judicial and administrative rules relevant to the applicable jurisdiction to proceed with this case?
- Do I have any personal issues that may affect my professional boundaries or ability to conduct an unbiased evaluation?

Part of the psycho-social evidence is having guidelines regarding the way in which to facilitate a referral for forensic assessment. In research done by Botha (2010:26), guidelines were established in order to facilitate referral for forensic assessment. Some of the guidelines that a forensic social worker may follow include:

Table 2: Guidelines for forensic social workers in assessment

Determine in a given situation the clear defining scope of practice between social worker and forensic social worker.
Determine personal knowledge, experience and skills in the field of practice.
Determine the protocol to be followed within organisations for referral from social worker to forensic social worker.

Determine the need for training as an expert witness in court.
Determine the level of skills in forensic assessment and how to conduct it.
Determine the understanding of a medical examination as collateral information for further investigation.

This table provides guidelines for social workers with regard to the statutory and forensic processes to be followed when an assessment is required. In general, social workers are trained to deal with these aspects of statutory work. Important though, is to realise that sexual abuse in the field of forensic science (and social work *per se*) asks for a set of competencies much broader than those associated with the general social work practitioner. This will be investigated in the empirical section of this research.

2.5 SKILLS OF THE FORENSIC SOCIAL WORKER WORKING IN THE LEGAL DOMAIN

2.5.1 Report writing

In her research, Mnisi (2010:15) emphasis the important role a forensic social worker plays in the courts of justice in South Africa where children are concerned. She also states that it is an established practice that social workers submit professional social work reports to these courts. “Regardless of the type of report and the type of court that requested it, it is regarded as an instrument to be used in the judicial process in order to do justice to the people concerned” (De Koning, 2007 in Mnisi: 2010:1).

The competency report is a frequently requested report by criminal courts in cases of child sexual abuse. According to Mnisi (2010:1), a competency report is used to determine the reliability of the testimony of the child. Gallinetti (2006:43) argues that, in order for a child to give evidence in court, the competency of this child needs to be established. This competency process relates to whether the child has sufficient intelligence, sense and reason in order to understand the difference between truth and falsehood and to recognise the true meaning of honesty in court. Lyon (2010:64) supports this and states that the test for competency requires that the witnesses have

sufficient intelligence, observation skills, the seriousness of taking an oath and, again, honesty.

Gallinetti (2006:77) also states that conflicting arguments about the reliability of child witnesses are found in literature. The competency of forensic social workers is one of caution, where they should remind themselves of the dangers inherent in the testimony of children. The request from the court for a social worker competency report is provided for in terms of section 170A (2)(b) of the Criminal Procedures Act, Act 51 of 1997. According to Mnisi (2010:5), requests of this nature place a huge responsibility on the forensic social worker's competencies. She emphasises the fact that not only should the social worker know what the court expects, but she should also understand what to include in the competency report to the court in cases of child sexual abuse.

2.5.2 The forensic social worker as expert witness

The forensic social worker submitting expert opinions within the legal system is required to be knowledgeable regarding all forensic aspects of the investigation, and to be both ethical and unbiased. According to Kenton (2008:54), an expert witness, professional witness or judicial expert is a witness, who by virtue of education, training, skills or experience, is believed to have expertise and specialised knowledge in a particular subject beyond that of the average person. It is also sufficient that others may officially and legally rely on the witness's specialised (scientific, technical or other) opinion about an evidence or fact issue within the scope of his expertise, referred to as the expert opinion, as an assistance to the fact-finder. Expert witnesses may also deliver expert evidence concerning facts from the domain of their expertise. At times, their testimony may be rebutted with a learned treatise, sometimes to the detriment of their reputations.

From the above, it is evident that the forensic social worker should have skills and experience in the presentation of expert witness statements. The amount of training, skills and support as an expert witness will be investigated during the empirical

process of this study. One of the most important skills the forensic social worker should have is communication skills with children. According to Springer & Roberts (2007:54), a lack of special communication skills with children may lead to a lack of trust and failure to gather sufficient information to prosecute when necessary.

2.5.3 Communication with children

The forensic social worker must have a special set of attributes when it comes to communicating with children. According to Cronch, Viljoen and Hansen (2006), the recognition of differences between the communication processes in therapeutic intervention and forensic intervention is very important. The communication process mainly refers to a process of forensic interviewing. Forensic interviewing of children has become the cornerstone of investigations into child sexual abuse, and often produces evidence that will stand up in court if the investigation leads to criminal prosecution. Studies by the same authors (Cronch, Viljoen & Hansen: 2006) have examined several factors that influence disclosure during interviews, including characteristics of both interviewer and child. Numerous interviewing techniques have received attention in the literature, including allegation blind interviews, open-ended questioning and cognitive interviewing, the Touch Survey, truth-lie discussions, and the use of anatomical dolls. Studies by Wood & Garven (2000) have examined new directions in forensic interviewing, such as structured interview protocols and the extended forensic evaluation model.

Children grow and pass through different stages of development in which their language skills, reasoning abilities and behaviour patterns are unique to their age group (Bourg, 1999:11). The author adds that these changes and phases of development can become challenging to the interviewer. The challenge is for the child interviewer to be well trained in child development and sufficiently experienced in conversing with children. As cited in Bourg (1999:12), research suggests that when child interviewers are knowledgeable about child development and are trained in forensic interviewing, more accurate information is obtained and children experience less stress. It is thus important that the forensic social worker must have the

competency to communicate with the child on a level where the child will clearly understand proceedings, and that interviews are conducted in a strictly professional way in order that the best interests of the child may be served.

From the above, it is evident that the social worker needs to have specific competencies in order to work in the forensic environment. The question that arises next is what the personal and professional needs of the social worker will be in relation to these competencies. These needs are discussed in the next section.

2.6 NEEDS OF THE FORENSIC SOCIAL WORKER IN THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

Collins (2003:2) highlights the fact that there has been an increase in the number of empirical studies on the topic of child sexual abuse in South Africa during the past three decades. These research efforts have provided professionals with valuable information and knowledge about the topic, with one focusing in particular on the personal and professional needs of the social worker. Every individual has a unique set of personal needs (apart from basic survival needs) that must be met in order to function at his or her best. The meeting of such personal needs is critical in order for the individual to thrive. Important as personal needs may be, it is quite ironic that few people are actually aware of them. As a result, people generally go about meeting these needs unconsciously, often in ways that are at odds with living a fulfilling life. Collins argues that once social workers spend time discovering their personal needs and how to meet them in ways that work, their professional lives tend to improve much.

Limited literature was found on the need for interpersonal and self-supportive aspects involving social workers in forensic practice, although the issue that social workers operating in the child sexual abuse field might have various needs related to the working environment, did actually arise. Important however, is research conducted by the University of Pittsburg School of Social Work (2011:43) relating to the personal training needs of social workers operating in the field of forensic intervention. The

needs in question can be summarised as follows:

The need to providing risk assessments, expert testimony, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and other timely best practices to both victims and offenders;

- The need to utilise evidence-based practices in child maltreatment and domestic violence assessment and treatment;
- The need to provide assessment and treatment of juvenile offenders;
- The need to provide mental health, drug and alcohol, medical and aftercare treatment for adult offenders;
- The need to get involved in trauma survivor assistance, victim-offender mediation and batterer's intervention programmes;
- The need to be skilled in restorative justice, giving expert testimony in child welfare and woman battering cases, as well as social worker mitigation testimony in death penalty cases;
- The need to know how to deal with the critical issues of punishment versus rehabilitation, deterrence, and determination of whether individual offenders are capable of change; and
- The need to be trained as change agents, legislative advocates, policy makers and programme administrators for both victims and offenders.

From this list of professional needs, the emphasis on personal involvement in social work is clearly evident. The fine distinction between professional and personal involvement may pave the way for compassion fatigue and professional burn-out. According to Van Hook and Rothenberg (2009:41), the social worker may still make provision for professional boundaries as required by policy; however, the natural

human desire to help is significantly diminished in the social services and caring professions. This phenomenon also occurs in the instance of professionals involved in long term health care – such as nurses and medical doctors – and needs to be discussed as a matter of urgency.

2.7 BURNOUT AND COMPASSION FATIGUE IN FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK

Working in the field of child sexual abuse can be traumatic due to the nature of working with traumatised children. Professional support is therefore essential in this field of work (SAPS, National Social Work Protocol, 2006:29). National Instruction number 18/1998 states that if a member of the SAPS has been subjected to a traumatic event, he or she should be debriefed in order to counteract burnout and compassion fatigue.

Many authors have recorded the fact that the nature of working in a sexual abuse and trauma field can be traumatic for the professional and may cause burn-out (Brinkman, R. & Kerschner, R. 2002; Belcher, 2004; Figley, C.R. 2002; Pfifferling, J.H. & Gilley, K. 2000). In the SAPS, forensic social workers are working in a military type of environment with its various structures. Their primary focus is to conduct forensic assessments with children against whom an alleged sexual offence has been committed. The nature of their work is not only demanding, but so are the perimeters of structures within which the forensic social workers are required to work. According to the SAPS National Social Work Protocol (2006:29), forensic social work is a new field within the SAPS and therefore it is important that support should also involve guidance regarding the investigation of difficult forensic cases and the getting of expert testimony.

Rothschild (2006:201) states that part of the essential training is to ensure that burnout and compassion fatigue do not occur. It is evident from literature that few studies have focused specifically on forensic social workers and their emotional exhaustion from working with traumatised clients, also referred to as compassion fatigue. In order to determine the needs and skills of social workers in particular,

Pfifferling & Gilley (2000:114) argue that it is necessary to understand the risk of compassion fatigue (the trauma suffered by the helping professional) and burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced sense of personal accomplishment), and the potential for compassion satisfaction (the fulfilment originating from helping others and of positive collegial relationships) in this field.

Burnout can affect any person who daily works with people. Koprowska (2008:162) defines burnout as a “*state where people can no longer connect authentically to their work, to themselves or to service users*”. The author further explains that burnout has three dimensions, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and loss of personal accomplishment. Maslach *et al.*, in Koprowska (2008:162) state that depersonalisation occurs when one becomes unfeeling towards service users. A loss of personal accomplishment results in a loss of satisfaction and a sense of incompetence while working with people occurs. The author goes on to say that badly managed burnout causes impaired self-esteem, effectiveness in work may be reduced and such burnout can drive valuable individuals out of a profession.

Forensic social workers need to be sensitive to their professional and personal functioning and even more sensitive to the symptoms of burnout. They are prone to be affected by burnout and need to develop ways of protecting themselves against it (Johnson, 1995:249-250). It is evident that, for the purpose of this study, the researcher needs to determine through empirical research what the needs of forensic social workers are with regards to self-care and processes to counteract compassion fatigue and burnout.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has served to provide the reader with a broad framework of forensic social work in South Africa and, more specifically, within welfare organisations in which forensic social workers are appointed. It is also evident from this literature that forensic social work is regarded as a specialised field under the umbrella of social work. Likewise, it is a new field within the South African Police Services (SAPS) with

twenty-seven forensic social workers specifically appointed in 2007 to conduct forensic assessments of sexual offence cases.

From the literature discussed in this chapter, it is quite apparent that specific training and the acquisition of appropriate competencies are especially important when evaluating cases in the domain of forensic social work, especially when dealing with suspected child sexual abuse. The chapter further informs us that the training and skills should include, *inter alia*, specialised training in communication, the use of assessment frameworks, the identification of sexual abuse and the necessary experience regarding the fulfilment of a dual role, namely that of the person responsible for both therapeutic intervention as well as forensic investigation. A lack of training or inadequate familiarity with the aspects of child sexual abuse will lead to an impediment regarding the fulfilling of that professional role while evaluating sexually abused children, resulting in poorly validated application of principles or professional attitudes (Clark, 2009:77). Training, which is especially needed in the use of certain techniques, can enhance the accuracy of information obtained concerning child sexual abuse (Ceci *et al.*, in Clark, 2009:78).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND EMPIRICAL DATA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research methodology and procedure that was followed will be described. By giving a clear description of the methodology used, the reader will now gain clarity regarding the manner in which the research was conducted and the nature of the methods that were used to gather the required data. The relationship between the research question or problem and the data collected should also become apparent. According to Henning (2004:129), analysing data is not an isolated process, but it is guided by the research objectives that were formulated and stated even before the research took on any form. The collection and the analysis of data were inspired by the research question, which reconfirmed the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2007:107; Creswell, Hanson, Clark, Plano & Morales, 2007:238).

For the sake of clarifying the research findings, the objectives as stated in chapter one will be given again:

- To undertake an in-depth literature study to explore the theoretical aspects of the field of forensic social work with emphasis on child sexual abuse;
- To conduct an empirical study by means of collecting evidence through a self-constructed questionnaire where the skills and professional needs required for training in the applied field will reflect;
- To analyse and describe the data gathered by means of conclusions after data analysis; and
- To draw conclusions and formulate recommendations to assist the social work environment (welfare organisations, social workers and higher education institutions) in supporting training and professional development in the field of forensic practice.

The views of social workers operating in a forensic environment (sexual abuse) in the

Western Cape were obtained by administering a structured questionnaire. The population consisted of all social workers working in the forensic environment in welfare organisations in the Western Cape. Data collection elicited descriptive data that were submitted to descriptive analysis. The researcher employed various measures to enhance data quality. She ensured that she strictly complied with ethical research principles.

3.2 QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are a number of aspects that are characteristic of the quantitative approach. The researcher will discuss some of these characteristics as stipulated by Andersen and Taylor (2009) and as applicable to this study.

- *The researcher is an objective observer whose involvement is limited to gaining specific data.* The researcher was an objective observer in this study as she used questionnaires to obtain data and had no further intervention to gain information.
- *Research is focused on specific questions that remain constant throughout the study.* In this study, the researcher compiled a structured questionnaire and each respondent was asked the same questions which therefore remained constant throughout the study.
- *All planning for the research is done before the study commences.* The research design, as well as the data collection (by means of a questionnaire and a population of social workers) was decided on before the research commenced.
- *Data collection is undertaken in a standardised method, for example all participants answer the same questionnaire.* In this study, all the participants answered the same questionnaire and no other questions were asked or explored.
- *Data collectors obtain only specified information and do not provide interpreters and observation.* The researcher was the data collector and no other field worker

was used. The information given by the respondent was the only information that was recorded accurately.

3.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research activities that were undertaken were summarised by means of a structured research approach unique to the quantitative process as stipulated by Fouché and Delport (2011:133). The research design used in this approach gave rise to an overall plan for obtaining answers to the questions being studied. Polit and Beck (2004:209) and Roese-Grippa, Haber, LoBiondo and Gorney-Moreno (2006:132) indicate that the researcher should be able to guide the research by an overarching consideration, namely whether the design does the best possible job of providing trustworthy answers to the research question.

To achieve the research objectives and to address the research problem, the researcher conducted quantitative research. A quantitative research plan generates quantifiable data. It is primarily concerned with observable and measurable phenomena involving people, events or things and establishing the strength of the relationship between variables, usually by statistical tests. The characteristics of this research are in accordance with the quantitative research paradigm. Its focus was concise and narrow (Couchman & Dawson, 1995:40).

During the planning phases, time and effort went into the gathering of and sifting through relevant literature. The emphasis was on selecting appropriate literature in accordance with the research goal of the study. The researcher undertook an in-depth literature review. This is reflected in Chapter 2. The two main concepts that were highlighted in Chapter 2 are the role of forensic social work as a specialised field, and the needs and skills of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse.

3.4 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method is discussed by referring to sampling, data-collection and data-analysis.

The researcher selected a research design that was appropriate to the problem statement. A quantitative-descriptive (survey) design was used. These types of research designs are placed together and are of a more quantitative nature. The data collection method that is most appropriate for this type of study is the self-administered questionnaire and respondents are selected by means of randomised sampling methods (Fouché & De Vos, 2005:137; Eiselen, Uys & Potgieter, 2005:3).

The motivation for the researcher's use of self-administered questionnaires was as follows:

- It was cost effective
- It was easy to administer and analyse
- It reduced the possibility of interviewer bias
- It was convenient, since the respondents were able to complete it at a time and place that was convenient to them.

Authors such as Zaaiman (2003:37), Eiselen, Uys and Potgieter (2005:53) mention that a questionnaire is the most common data collection method for a survey and that questionnaires usually form an integral part of descriptive and opinion-related surveys. It is also important to know that the formulation of the questions, as well as the structure of the questionnaire is critical to the success of the survey. The researcher therefore developed a questionnaire that was properly constructed and worded, making sure that there were no variations in the way the questionnaire would be administered. She also checked that there was no missing or ambiguous information.

A sample was then selected, focusing on organisations where social workers assessed allegations of child sexual abuse in the Western Cape. The researcher compiled a list of welfare organisations working in the field of forensic social work.

They then became the population for the research. They were contacted telephonically and four welfare organisations in the Western Cape indicated that they would participate in the research. Elston and Johnson (1994:15) state that a population consists of the individuals who have certain characteristics and attributes in which the researcher is interested. In this study, the sample comprised four organisations from the total population, with nineteen social workers in these four organisations completing the questionnaires.

The questionnaire was pilot tested and the result was used to improve the questionnaire for the main study. The main study was then completed with the researcher distributing the structured questionnaires to the respondents. The completed questionnaires were subsequently analysed and interpreted.

➤ Types of questions used in the questionnaire

The researcher used close-ended questions as well as open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

Three sections were developed:

- (a) Section one: biographical information
- (b) Section two: skills in forensic social work
- (c) Section three: opinion-related questions.

3.4.1 Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the degree to which inferences can legitimately be made from the operationalization in this study to the theoretical constructs on which the operationalization was based. For the purpose of this study, a nomological network was used in order to assure construct validity.

The nomological network is an idea that was developed by Lee Cronbach and Paul Meehl in 1955 (Cronbach & Meehl:1955). Construct validity in psychological tests is part of the efforts to develop standards for psychological testing. The term

nomological is derived from Greek and means “lawful”, so the nomological network can be considered to be a “lawful network”. The nomological network was Cronbach and Meehl’s view of construct validity: that is, in order to provide evidence that the researcher’s measures have construct validity, they argued that a researcher had to develop a nomological network for measurement. This network would include the theoretical framework for what the researcher was trying to measure, an empirical framework for how the researcher was intending to measure it, and specification of the links between these two frameworks.

The nomological network for this study is founded on a number of principles that guided the researcher when trying to establish construct validity. These are:

- Scientifically, to make clear what something is or means, so that laws can be set forth in which that “something” occurs.
- The laws in a nomological network may relate:
 - observable properties or quantities to one another
 - different theoretical constructs to one another
 - theoretic constructs to observables.
- At least some of the laws in the network must involve observables.
- “Learning more about” a theoretical construct is a matter of elaborating the nomological network in which it occurs or of increasing the definiteness of its components.
- The basic rule for adding a new construct or relation to a theory is that it must generate laws (nomologicals) confirmed by observation or reduce the number of nomologicals required to predict some observables.
- Operations that are qualitatively different “overlap” or “measure the same thing” if their positions in the nomological net link them to the same construct variable.

From this process, questions were identified and formulated to compile a questionnaire (see questionnaire used in the research as an attachment).

3.4.2 Reliability

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004), reliability refers to the quality of measurement in quantitative research. They refer to it as a process in its everyday sense, where reliability is the “consistency” or “repeatability” of the researcher’s measures. The researcher tested reliability by means of the pilot study where the answers to each question were compared and evaluated with a specific focus on the response patterns associated with each question.

3.4.3 Data analysis

The main research was conducted by means of data capturing or field work. After the questionnaires had been completed and gathered, the data contained therein were analysed. The research was of a descriptive nature and therefore descriptive statistics were calculated. Descriptive statistics enable a researcher to reduce, summarise and describe quantitative data obtained from empirical evidence (Polit & Beck, 2004:716). Descriptive statistics also provide simple summaries of the sample and the measures. Together with simple graphics analysis, the data form the basis of the interpretation and presentation. The analysis is followed by the interpretation of the results that are presented in this report.

With regards to the nominal data in the questionnaire, the researcher calculated frequency statistics and the modes. The items, which were measured on the ordinal level, were subjected to calculation of the frequencies, medians and means. The means were only calculated for statistical purposes, namely to serve as a basis for the survey. The descriptive statistics were applied to determine whether there were any differences between the responses among the respondents.

3.5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The researcher displayed the quantitative data by means of descriptive statistics in tables with histograms and pie charts. The graphical presentation was done on a computer and in Word format.

3.5.1 The respondent's professional status

The reason for asking the status of respondents is mainly to establish the framework for further answers. The status may also give an indication of how professional training in this field may influence social workers' perception of their past training.

Table 3 presents the professional status of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse.

Table 3: Professional status of respondents

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma	1	5,2%
B.A. degree	9	47,4%
Honours degree	4	21,1%
Master's degree	5	26,3%
PHD	0	0
Total	19	100%

The information presented in Table 1 is displayed visually by means of a bar graph of the professional status distribution of the respondents. As presented below, a clear layout of the difference in professional status of respondents involved in this study is displayed:

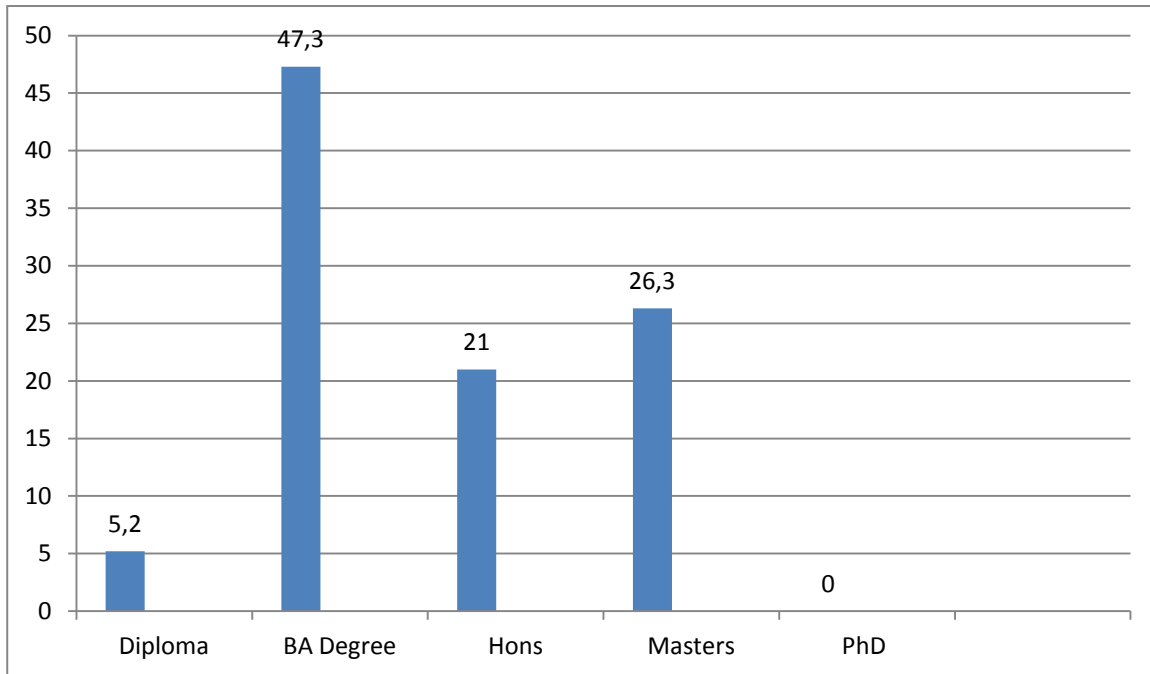


Figure 1: Professional status of respondents

In order to register as a social worker, a basic social work degree (diploma or three-year degree or an honours degree) is required. All other training, for example a master’s degree or PhD in social work, is regarded as value adding to the prescribed minimum qualification (SACSSP, 2012). From the distribution above, it is clear that 47,3 % of the participants do have a value-adding component in addition to their basic training.

Conclusion 1

Almost half of the respondents do have specialised postgraduate training in social work. According to the literature in Chapter 2, basic social work training is not enough in order to assist social workers in the field of forensic practice. Although the percentage (47,3%) may reflect an eagerness for continuing professional development, the ideal situation would be to ensure that all social workers working in forensic practice actually do get specialised training in this field as a minimum requirement.

3.5.2 Working experience of respondents

The experience in completed years of respondents who participated in this study varied considerably (Figure 2).

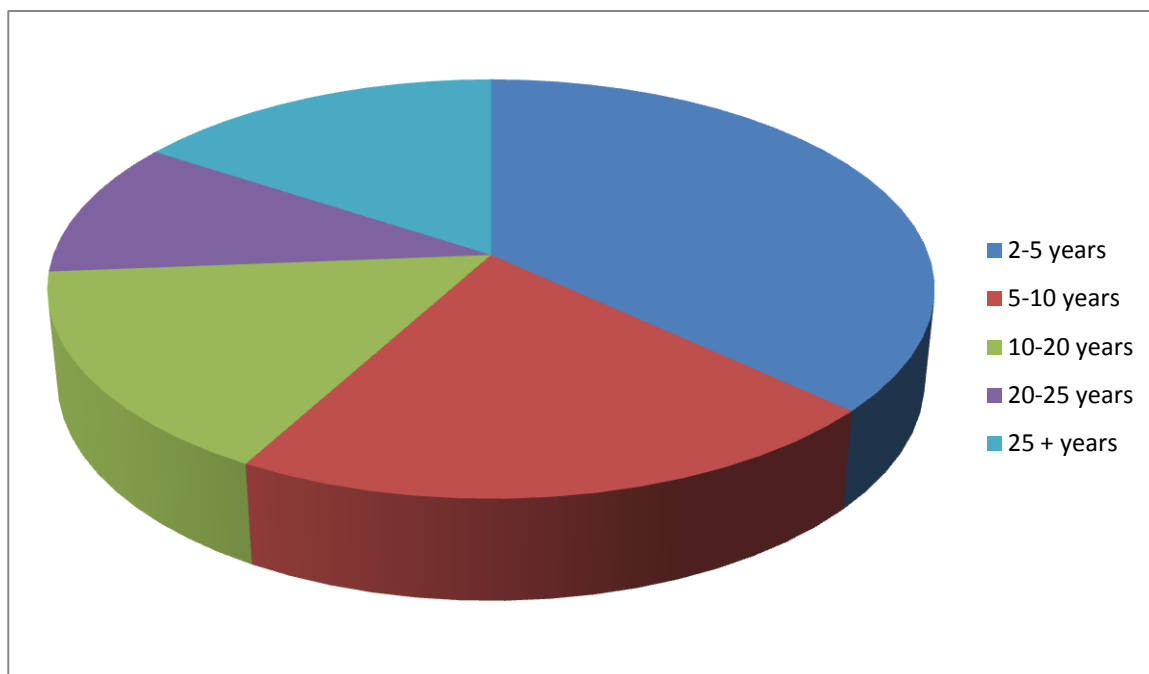
In Table 4 below, the working experience of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse is presented.

Table 4: Working experience of respondents

Working experience in field of forensic social work with emphasis on sexual abuse	Frequency	Percentage
2-5 years	7	36,8%
5-10 years	4	21%
10-20 years	3	15,7%
20-25 years	2	10,5%
25 years and more	3	15,7%
Total	19	100%

The working experience (in number of years) of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse also varied considerably.

Figure 2: Graphical presentation of the working experience of respondents



Thirty-six comma eight percent (36,8%) of the respondents has between 2-5 years working experience in years. Assessing allegations of child sexual abuse is said to be a field in which specialised training is required along with the indispensable experience in working and communicating with children. If training is received while working with child sexual abuse, then these social workers also need the working experience to be able to implement their acquired knowledge and skills in practice. The researcher however, found that 36,8% of the respondents have only the minimal number of years of working experience. It is, however, unknown to the researcher whether the working experience indicated includes the sexual abuse field or another field of work.

Conclusion 2

Work experience reflects skills that include personal abilities and are indicative of talents that help social workers carry out work-related tasks. Many social worker-related skills are somewhat broad, including good communication, and problem solving. Depending on the environment under discussion, though, skills can be much nuanced. Forensic social workers need a unique set of abilities different from, for instance, those of probation workers, community workers, school social workers and play therapists. Many posts offered in the field of forensic practice set out the skills required for the work, and job seekers also typically list their relevant qualifications in their applications. General lack of experience in this regard may jeopardise the workers' wellbeing in specialised fields. Literature in Chapter 2 indicates that this may lead to serious levels of burnout and compassion fatigue amongst forensic social workers. The reality is that most social workers who apply for these positions may not have the necessary experience. A possible solution may be that a personal development plan in the organisation may counteract lack of experience.

3.5.3 Previous working experience of respondents

The respondents' previous working experience involved a variety of services rendered. Each respondent chose more than one service that they rendered in their previous employment, which thus does not reflect a total of 19 respondents.

Figure 3: Previous working experience of respondents

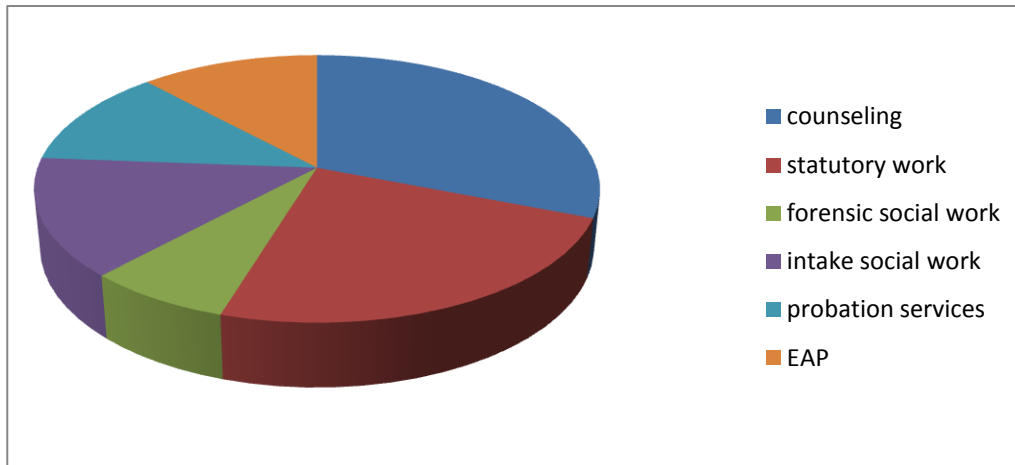


Table 5: Previous working experience of respondents

Work experience	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Counselling	13	30,95
Statutory work	10	23,8
Forensic social work	3	7,2
Intake social work	6	14,28
Probation services	5	11,9
Employee assistance services	5	11,9
Total	*** not intended to reflect a total**	

From the above, it is clear that thirteen respondents had previous working experience in the field of counselling and only three respondents had done forensic social work. However, the possibility may not be excluded that counselling may involve assessing allegations of child sexual abuse, due to the fact that the researcher found at some of the organisations that social workers assessing the allegations of child sexual abuse also assess the children before the therapy (counselling) takes place. The possibility thus remains that a total of sixteen respondents may actually have previous experience of assessing allegations of child sexual abuse.

The question resulted in respondents indicating more than one service that they rendered in their working experience. Often social workers are involved in more than

one task, for example they would be the intake social worker as well as the therapeutic social worker.

Conclusion 3

The primary focus in the roles forensic social workers fulfilled in past positions was counselling, which indicates that core competencies in counselling do exist and can be integrated with competencies that have already been acquired.

3.5.4 Skills in forensic social work

3.5.4.1 The respondents' current function in their employment

Table 6 below represents the respondents' function at their current place of employment. The respondents indicated that their current function would not involve only a single aspect of services rendered. Ten of the nineteen respondents indicated that they were currently involved in therapeutic intervention as well as forensic work, and sixteen of them indicated that they do only forensic work in their present working environment.

Table 6: Respondents' current function in their place of employment

Respondents' current function	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Forensic practice alone	16	61,5
Therapeutic intervention combined with forensic practice	10	38,5

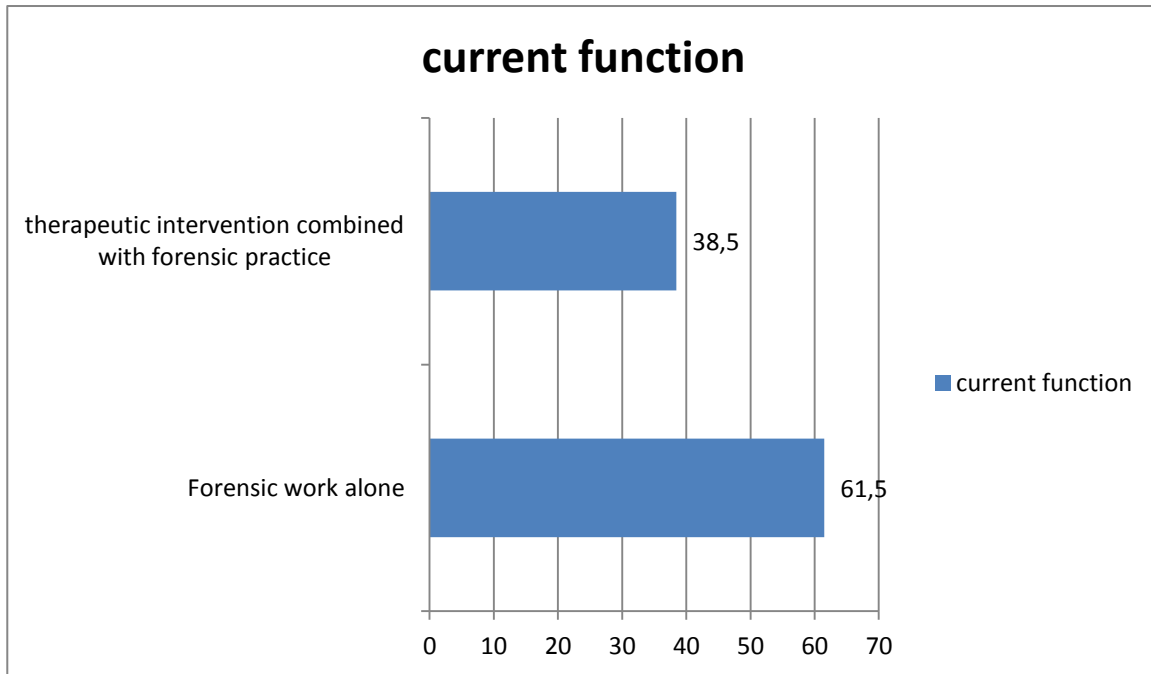


Figure 4: Respondents' current function at their place of employment

From the above, it is evident that 38,5% of all social workers in forensic practice are also involved in therapeutic intervention in their current employment. As mentioned in the study at an earlier stage, therapeutic intervention at most organisations involves assessing allegations of child sexual abuse, though not forensically. Sixty-one comma five percent (61,5%) of social workers in forensic practice indicated that this was all they were required to do.

Conclusion 4

From the literature (Chapter 2) it is evident that a combination of therapeutic and forensic roles is found in the forensic practice environment. The reality of time management needs to be evaluated to determine whether social workers in forensic practice have sufficient time and administrative back-up to engage in a therapeutic context. Training sessions should therefore also include a synergy between therapeutic intervention and forensic roles up to a point where both therapeutic intervention and forensic practice will be synchronised to best serve the interests of children.

3.5.4.2 Relevant skills needed to conduct general or forensic assessments

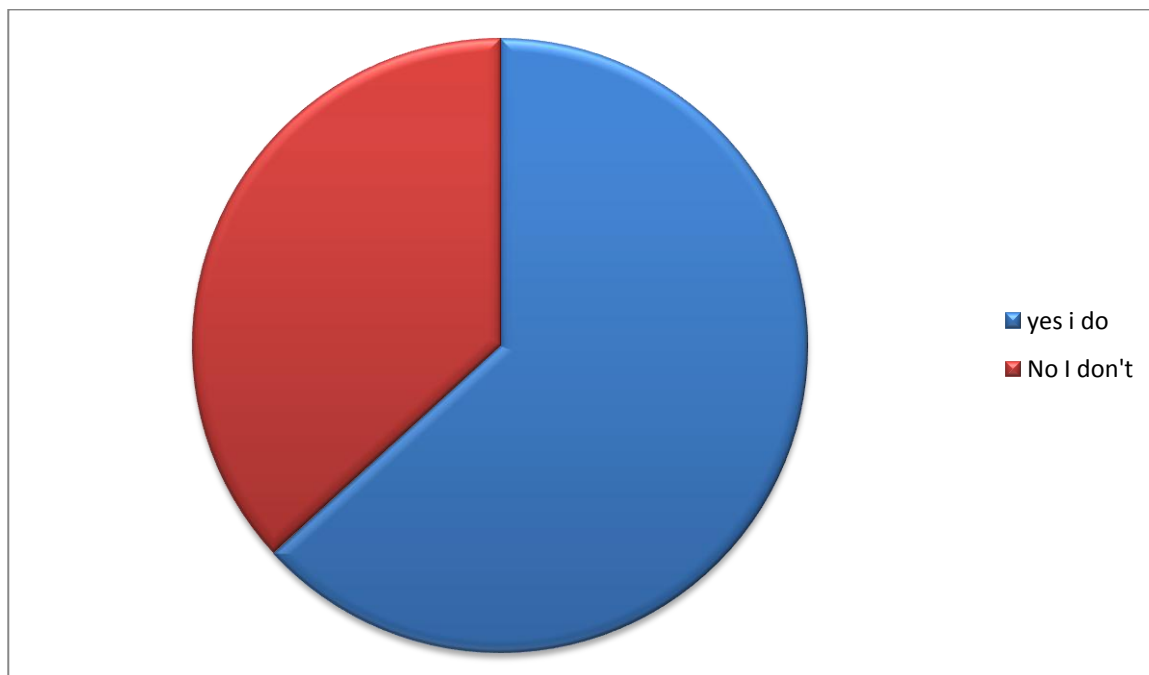
Table 7 below is a representation of whether the respondents perceived that they possessed the necessary skills needed to conduct forensic assessments or not.

Table 7: Respondents' perceptions of whether they have the disposal of the relevant skills

Respondents' perceptions	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	12	63,2%
No	7	36,8%
Total	19	100%

Twelve (63,2%) of the above respondents felt that they had acquired the relevant skills needed in order to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse, while seven (36,8%) of the respondents felt that they had not acquired the relevant skills.

Figure 5: Graphical presentation of the respondents' perceptions of whether or not they had acquired the relevant skills needed to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse



Conclusion 5

The vast majority of respondents felt that they did have the disposal of adequate skills to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse. Training regarding different issues in the field of their working environment, however, seems to be of bigger importance than needs in the field of sexual abuse.

3.5.4.3 Type of training received in order to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse

Respondents were asked what kind of training they had received in order to conduct assessment of child sexual abuse. Literature (Chapter 2) emphasises the importance of formal training of forensic social workers in appropriate ways to enable them to assess child sexual abuse. The literature points out that social workers campaigned for a decade for child sex abuse allegations to be taken seriously, and that they were now being criticised for their well-intentioned (albeit misguided) efforts to advocate for children who cannot advocate for themselves. The criticism, however, is not against

advocacy for children, but against poor quality training and of lack of training with regard to investigative procedures. Poorly trained workers and investigators make mistakes unintentionally owing to a lack of vital knowledge of the fundamentals delineated here, giving rise to legal and personal fiascos. Whichever training is chosen as the method to train child protective services workers, or even others for that matter, the fundamental procedures delineated herein should form the minimal foundation for a clinical investigation.

Table 8: Relevant training to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse received

Type of training received	Frequency of respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Basic course in forensic interviewing and assessments	10	52,6
Structured play therapy course	1	5,2
Child assessment course	1	5,2
Workshops on child abuse and sexual abuse	1	5,2
In-service training	1	5,2
Workshop in forensic interviewing	1	5,2
Specialised training in forensic practices such as master's degree in forensic social work	0	0
No training	4	21
TOTAL	19	100%

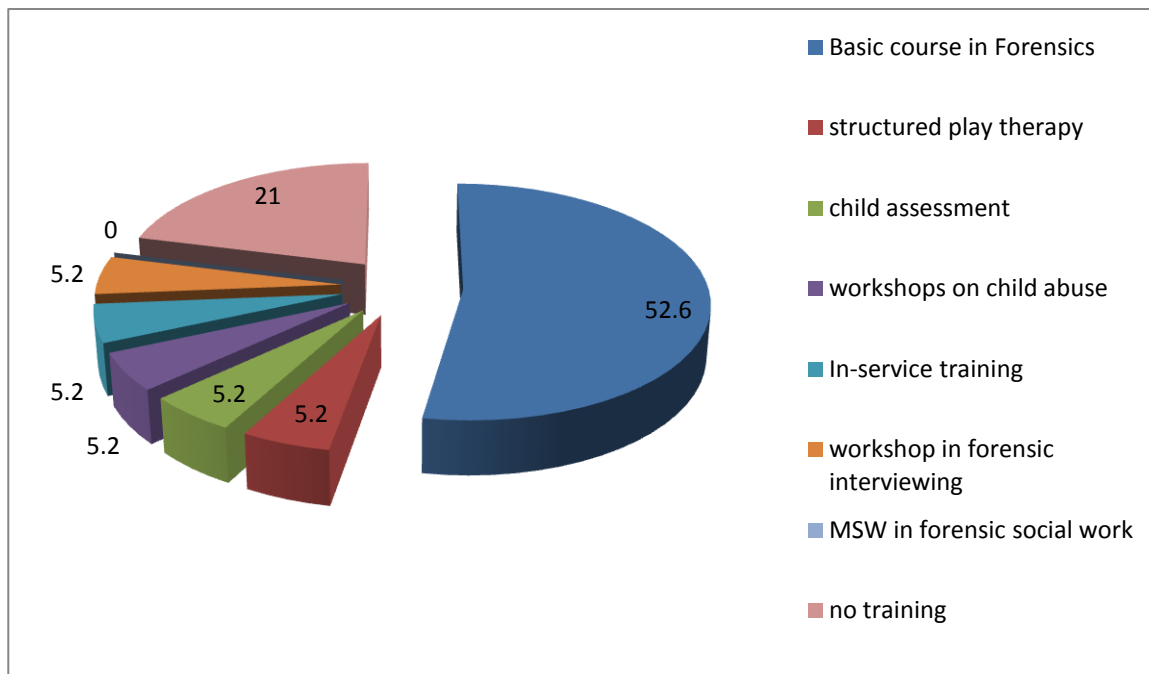


Figure 6: Relevant training to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse received

This question is based on the previous question regarding whether the respondents perceived that they had the disposal of the relevant skills to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse. From the above, it is clear that ten (10) of the respondents indicated that they had done a basic course in forensic interviewing and assessments, while five had either done a structured play therapy course, child assessment course, workshops on child abuse and sexual abuse or workshops in forensic interviewing. One of the respondents, however, indicated that he or she had done in-service training, but the type of training is unknown to the researcher.

In the previous graphical presentation, we saw that twelve (12) respondents indicated that they had received relevant training and seven (7) indicated they had not. Three respondents, who had previously indicated that they had not received the relevant training, now added the type of training received.

Conclusion 6

Owing to the fact that assessing allegations of child sexual abuse – whether therapeutically or forensically – needs in-depth, specialised training it, however, appears that the social workers still lack the quality continuous training that is needed. According to literature (Stutterheim & Weyers, 1999; Roberts & Brownell, 1999), once-off training needs to be in-depth, focused and specialised. A day course in child sexual abuse or forensic interviewing cannot truly support the social workers when they have to assess a high profile case and testify as expert witness in a court of law. In its guidelines for investigative interviewing in cases of alleged child abuse (1997), the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) states that “investigative interviewing in cases of alleged abuse requires specialised knowledge”.

3.5.4.4 Perceptions of respondents of whether they have sufficient assessment tools to utilise when conducting forensic assessments

Assessment tools include everything that the social worker requires in order to conduct an effective assessment. Depending on the social worker’s approach to conducting an assessment, for example using play techniques as a tool to assess a child, that social worker might need relevant toys such as the anatomically appropriate dolls, miniature figures and clay to ensure accurate assessment.

Nine (9) of the respondents indicated that they had sufficient assessment tools to use when conducting forensic assessments or assessments in general for children exposed to child sexual abuse. Ten (10) indicated that they did not have the disposal of the tools required for assessment and needed to rely on basic skills gained from previous experiences in practice.

Assessing allegations of child sexual abuse requires the social worker to have the necessary interview tools ranging from literature to playing tools such as dolls and clay to be able to conduct an effective interview. The social worker would then also need the relevant training in order to know how to optimally utilise these tools.

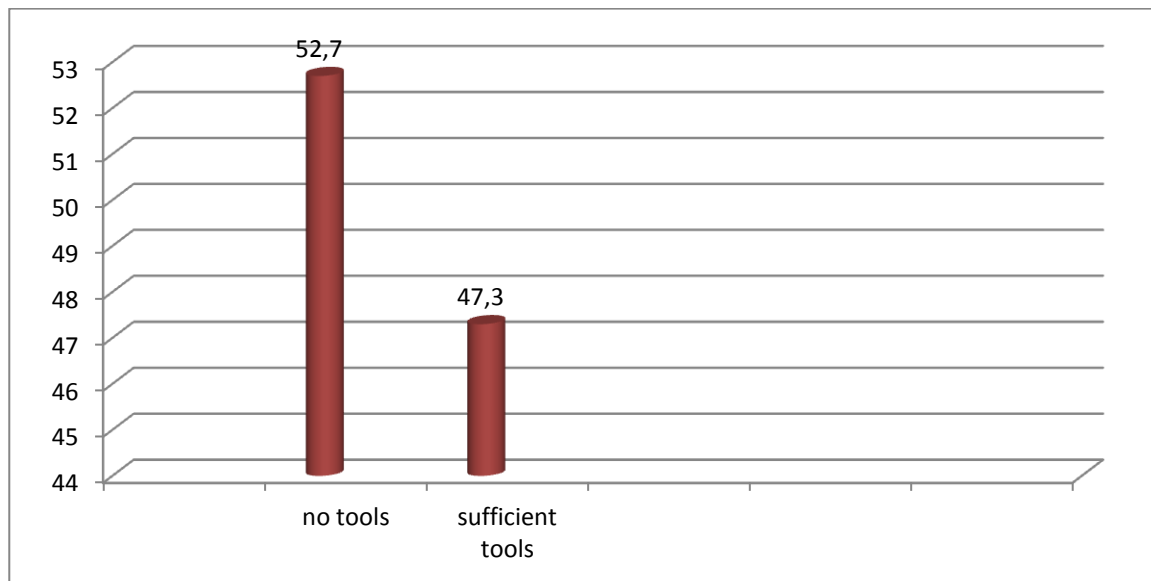
Figure 7 is a graphical presentation of whether the respondents perceived that they had all the appropriate tools to use when conducting an assessment of child sexual abuse.

Table 9: Perceptions of respondents of whether social workers had sufficient assessment tools to use when conducting forensic assessments

Tools	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
No tools – only basic skills and previous experience	10	52,7
Sufficient tools from basic training	9	47,3
Total	19	100

One of the respondents said that she was newly employed at an organisation that conducts assessments in allegations of child sexual abuse, but will be attending training only in the course of the following year.

Figure 7: Perceptions of respondents of whether they had sufficient assessment tools to use when conducting forensic assessments



Conclusion 7

Social workers in forensic practice need a wide range of tools to address the variety of assessment challenges that arise in daily practice. The British Association for Play Therapy (BAPT) (2012) indicates that no assessment may take place if the social worker does not undertake the assessment of the children using various play therapy assessment tools, depending on the needs of each individual case.

3.5.4.5 Adequate knowledge regarding the law and the ability to testify as expert witness in criminal proceedings

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they disposed of sufficient knowledge regarding the law and the ability to testify in criminal proceedings.

Table 10: Sufficient knowledge of the law (legal proceedings in forensic work) in order to testify as an expert witness in criminal proceedings

Respondents' comments	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
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No	3	15,8%
Yes	16	84,2%
Total	19	100

Figure 8: Adequate knowledge of the law (legal proceedings in forensic work) in order to testify as an expert witness in criminal proceedings

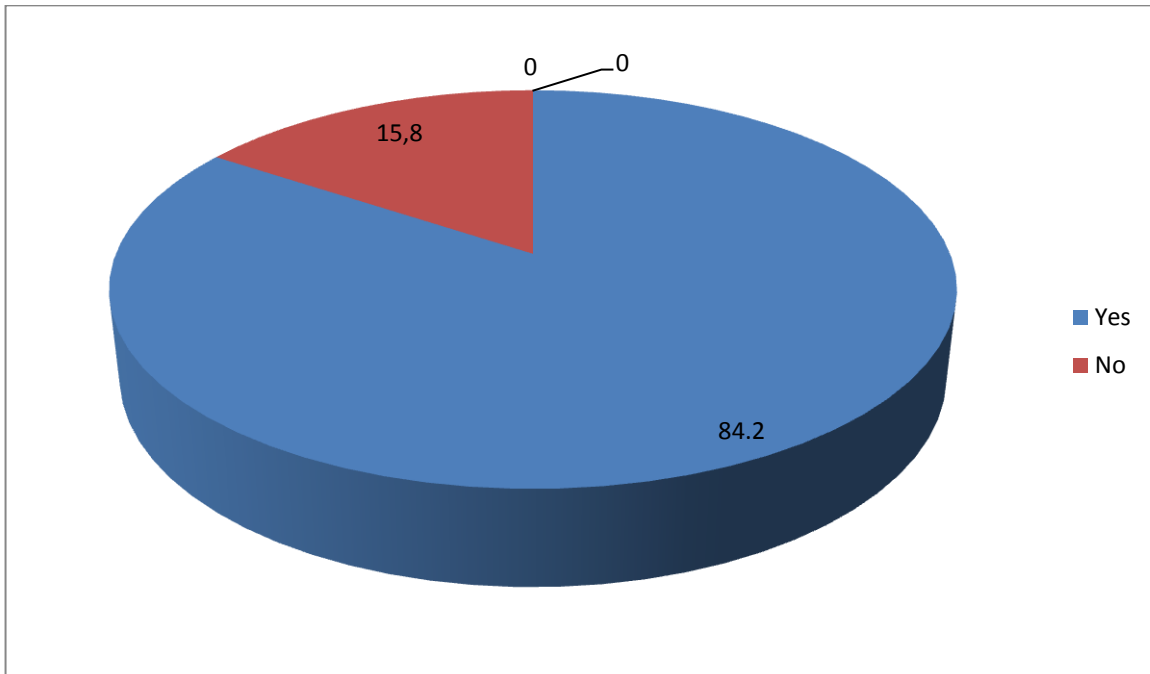


Figure 8 indicates that sixteen 16 (84,2%) respondents thought that they do perceive themselves as having sufficient knowledge of the law (legal proceedings in forensic work) and the ability to testify as expert witnesses in criminal proceedings. Three (15,8%) respondents indicated that they did not have at their disposal the required knowledge of the law (legal proceedings in forensic work) and ability to actually testify. Testifying in a court of law is a crucial part of a professional career with regards to the case that the professional has been assessing.

Conclusion 8

Sufficient knowledge is needed in order for the professional to present factual information to the court. More than half of the respondents do have the disposal of this knowledge. The quality of forensic assessment reports for court relies heavily on the procedures and tools on which the social worker has to depend.

3.5.4.6 Suggestions of respondents

Respondents were asked what they suggested should be done to ensure that social workers are actually equipped with adequate knowledge regarding the field of practice to be able to testify as expert witnesses in criminal proceedings.

This process refers to continuing professional development. Continuing professional development, or better known as CPD, according to Van der Merwe and Van der Merwe (2008), consists of any educational activity that helps to maintain, develop or increase knowledge, problem solving, technical skills or professional performance standards – all with the goal that practitioners are equipped to provide a better professional service.

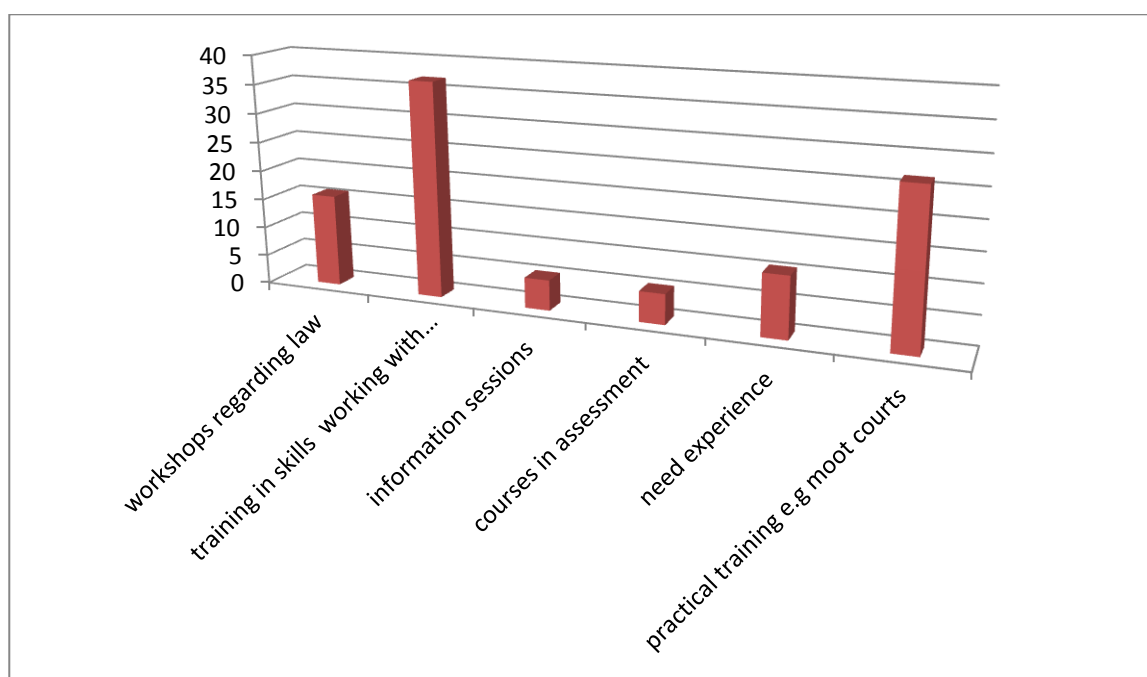
The following table presents the respondents' suggestions:

Table 11: Suggestions for better or more knowledge

Respondents' suggestions	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Workshops regarding the law, skills that social workers should have, questions that could be asked	3	15,8
Training skills focused on working with children	7	36,8
Information sessions regarding children and the	1	5,2

world of child care		
Assessment courses	1	5,2
Have knowledge but lack practical experience	2	10,5
Practical training and experience in court and court attendance such as moot courts	5	26,5
Total	19	100

Figure 9: Suggestions for improved or more knowledge



From the above table, the following ranking can be done from more important to less important aspects to be taken into consideration for acquiring more applicable knowledge:

- (1) Moot courts (A moot court is an extracurricular activity in which participants take part in simulated court proceedings.)
- (2) Training in skills involved in working with children

- (3) Experience
- (4) Workshops regarding the law
- (5) Information sessions
- (6) Courses in assessment skills

Conclusion 9

According to the guidelines for continuing professional development (CPD) at the South African Council for Social Services Professions, CPD aims to:

- Build knowledge and skills
- Keep practitioners abreast of developments in their field
- Promote confidence in practitioners' abilities to provide services of high standards
- Maintain professional standards
- Promote excellence for social workers

Training in the form of continuing professional development is pivotal to social work forensic practice in providing the structure and support for social workers to develop their capabilities throughout their careers: to update, extend and deepen knowledge, skills and analytical thinking to deal with increasingly complex and specialised work, and to develop professional identity and confidence in the field of forensic practice.

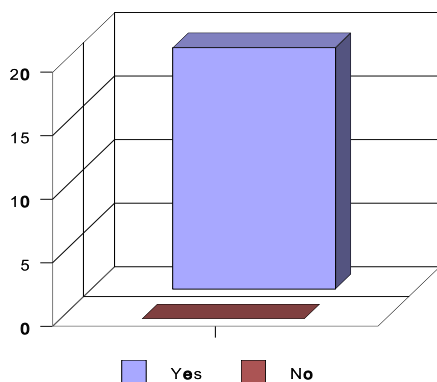
3.5.4.7 Skills in communicating with children

Nineteen (19) respondents, which is the total number of respondents (100%), said that they do have the relevant skills for communicating with children (Figure 8). This question forms the focus of communicating with children – an essential skill that respondents may have acquired in their previous and current working environment. The highlight with regards to the skills is what the researcher needed to know. In conducting forensic assessments with children, the child's developmental stage and child sexual abuse dynamics, non-leading communicative approaches have to be provided in order to eliminate contamination and to provide a neutral account to the court of law.

Table 12: Respondents’ perceptions of whether they thought they had the relevant skills for communicating with children

Perceptions of respondents of their communication skills	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	19	100%
No	0	0
Total	19	100

Figure 10: Respondents’ perceptions of whether they have the relevant skills for successful communicating with children



The changing culture of forensic social work with its ever-increasing emphasis on care management is leaving little time for the more intensive or longer term therapeutic work that once attracted many field social workers to the profession. This does not imply that a sound assessment of a child’s needs no longer demands the full range of social work skills. On the contrary, it can be argued that when a child’s future may largely depend on a concentrated assessment, the skills of an informed and reflective practitioner are currently needed more than ever before. It is therefore important that forensic social workers should feel adequately equipped with regard to communication skills in order for them to be effective in their working environment. Further research is necessary to determine the need to build on workers’ intuitive skills through training in therapeutic communication with both children and young people.

3.5.4.8 Skills obtained through communicating with children

Table 13 below presents the respondents' answers regarding the origin of their skills to communicate with children.

Table 13: Skills regarding communicating with children

Origin of skills with a view to communicating with children	Frequency	Percentage
Formal Training	19 out of 19	100%
Combination of practical and formal experience	11 out of 19	57,8%

Eleven (57,8%) of the respondents indicated that both training and previous experience equipped them with the skills to communicate with children. Nineteen (which is the total number of respondents: that is 100%) indicated that they had acquired the necessary skills to communicate with children through training. Eleven of the respondents indicated that both training as well as their previous working experience was the source of their skills.

3.5.4.9 The needs of social workers operating in a field of child sexual abuse

According to the Human Given Model (Griffin & Tyrrell: 2011), the following are the ten main innate emotional needs of care givers (social workers):

- Security – safe territory and an environment that allows the social worker to develop fully
- Attention (both given and received)
- Sense of autonomy and control
- Being emotionally connected to others
- Feeling part of a wider community
- Friendship
- Privacy

- Sense of status within social groupings
- Sense of competence and achievement
- Having meaning and purpose.

This question resulted in the respondents' describing what their needs were while working in a field of child sexual abuse. Common themes emerging from the data analysis of the open-ended questions included, *inter alia*:

Common theme from open-ended question	Literature control according to Griffin & Tyrrell (2011) with reference to emotional needs of social workers
Continuous exposure to research being conducted	Sense of competence and achievement
Continuous training and workshops in the field of sexual abuse	Sense of autonomy and control
Debriefing	Security and feeling connected to others
Knowledge of court procedures	Sense of competence and achievement
Higher conviction rates of perpetrators	Sense of competence and achievement
Forensic assessment training	Having meaning and purpose, sense of status within social groupings, sense of competence and achievement
Training regarding the law and sexual offences	Having meaning and purpose

The needs as described by the respondents indicate that they needed to be exposed to continuous professional development in terms of training and workshops. The respondents indicated that their needs were, *inter alia*, to be supervised and

debriefed, meaning that they needed at least some form of emotional support.

Conclusion 10

Emotional support was underscored in the research. According to Griffin & Tyrrell (2011:66), a list of the innate resources social workers have to meet in order to meet emotional needs can be:

The ability to develop complex long-term memory, which enables social workers to add to their innate knowledge and learning;

The ability to build rapport, empathise and connect with others in their working environment;

Imagination, which enables them to focus their attention away from their emotions, to use language and to problem solve more creatively and objectively;

Conscious, rational minds that can check out emotions, question, analyse and plan;

The ability to “know” – that is, to understand the world subconsciously through metaphorical pattern matching; and

An observing self – that part of social workers that can step back, be more objective and be aware of itself as a unique centre of awareness, apart from intellect, emotion and conditioning.

3.5.4.10 Burnout and compassion fatigue

From the literature in Chapter 2, it is evident that social workers are prone to burnout and need to develop ways of protecting themselves against this. The respondents were asked to comment on a statement that burnout is part of the reality of social workers. The question resulted in respondents indicating whether they felt the

statement was true or not. The total number of respondents (19) felt that this statement was true, as is shown in Table 14

Table 14: Respondents’ perceptions on burnout among social workers

Respondents’ perceptions that burnout is a reality in their profession	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
True	19	100%
False	0	0
Total	19	100%

From the above table, it is clear that the total number of respondents (100%) indicated that they agreed with the above statement made by the researcher. Although this may indicate a leading question, the acknowledgement of the statement reflects the awareness levels of social workers with regards to burnout and fatigue.

Common themes emerging from the data analysis of the open-ended questions were, *inter alia*:

- Social workers need to take responsibility for their own wellbeing;
- Social workers experience difficulty in finding ways and methods of self-care;
- Social workers can be exposed to burnout if they do not communicate their needs regarding their case load;
- Sexual abuse cases are emotionally draining and social workers can experience trauma due to the nature of this aspect of their work;
- Burnout can cause permanent damage to a social worker’s emotional wellbeing and they therefore need to develop ways to protect themselves;
- Social work is a profession that mostly fosters at the heart, therefore social workers need internal cleansing as often as possible; and
- Social workers need more supervision, guidance, training and adequate support.

Conclusion 11

“Burnout” as a term was discussed in Chapter 2 and describes what happens when a social worker becomes increasingly “inoperative”. According to the literature review, this progressive state of inoperability can manifest in many different forms, from simple rigidity in which “the person becomes “closed to any input”, to an increased resignation, irritability, and quickness to anger. As burnout worsens, however, its effects become more serious. An individual may become paranoid or self-medicate with legal or illegal substances. Eventually, a social worker afflicted with burnout may leave a promising career that he or she has worked very hard to attain or be removed from a position by a forced resignation, or so-called “firing”.

3.5.4.11 Need to counteract burnout

The respondents were asked what they needed to be able to counteract burnout. Answers varied from personal needs to professional needs. The most important needs are listed below:

- Regular supervision
- Team building
- More fully qualified and equipped social workers
- Staff development
- Regular in-service training and workshops to promote professional growth.

Social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse need regular supervision and training to promote both professional and interpersonal growth. The field of child sexual abuse can strain an individual emotionally due to the mere nature of the work. Social workers are aware of compassion fatigue and burnout as has previously been indicated.

3.5.4.12 Exposure to burnout

Respondents were asked what they would do if they did not receive support while suffering from burnout, and whether they would get professional help. Common themes emerging from the data analysis of this particular open-ended question was that they would:

- Change their field of work
- Seek supervision
- Seek external support
- Not be able to provide an effective service
- Seek private psychological assistance
- Resign from their positions.

Borritz, Bültmann, Rugulies, Christensen, Villadsen and Kristensen (2005:1022) indicate in research done that social work characteristics were prospectively associated with burnout, suggesting that improving the psychosocial work environment might help reduce future burnout in human service work.

Conclusion 12

From research, it is clear that specific strategies are suggested as coping strategies for social workers. These needs strategies have to be incorporated in the training practices of forensic social workers and must include the following as suggested by Smullens (2011):

Actively address problems. Take a proactive approach – rather than a passive one – to issues in your workplace. Social workers will feel less helpless if they are in a position to assert themselves and express their needs. If they do not have the authority or resources to solve the problem, they must be given the opportunity to talk to a superior.

Clarify the forensic social workers' job description. Ask a superior for an updated description of duties and responsibilities. Teach the social worker to point out things they are required to do that are not part of their actual job description. Ask for new duties if the first signs of burnout set in. If the social worker has been doing the exact same work for a long time, ask him or her to try something new: a different grade level, a different sales territory, a different environment or office. Take time off and manage leave. If burnout seems inevitable, take a complete break from work.

3.5.4.13 Personal influence of the working environment (sexual abuse) on personal or home life

Common themes emerging from the data analysis of the open-ended questions to the respondents regarding whether working in the field of child sexual abuse had changed their personal lives, were that they:

- Were more alert and even paranoid
- Were more protective of their own children
- Viewed every male with suspicion
- Viewed virtually all people as possible perpetrators
- Experienced fear of possible “sexual abuse” and anxiousness.

“Vicarious traumatization” (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Bober, T., Regehr, C. & Zhou, 2011) and “compassion fatigue” are theories predicting that, over time, social workers

who assist victims may experience indirect psychological effects of trauma, which can significantly alter the way victim helpers perceive the world and can even have lasting impacts on their feelings, relationships, and lives (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

Astin (1990) reported that her work as social worker with rape victims resulted in nightmares, extreme tension, and feelings of irritability, lending support to models of indirect traumatising. Empirical studies have also documented similar experiences among mental health service providers. Female counsellors who work with sexual assault survivors experience symptoms of distress (for example intrusive thoughts or memories, increased arousal, numbness) similar to those experienced by victims themselves (Pearlman & Maclan, 1995; Schauben & Frazier, 1995). Trauma counsellors also experience shattering of their basic beliefs about safety, trust in oneself and trust in the goodness of others by the traumatic nature of the stories they hear from clients almost daily (Johnson & Hunter, 1997; Pearlman & Maclan, 1995).

Victim advocates who do outreach work with rape survivors seeking help from community systems report feeling anger and fear in response to helping victims access medical and legal services (Wasco and Campbell, 2002). This line of research suggests that as survivors turn to social workers for help, the repeated exposure to the devastation of rape sooner or later impacts social workers' lives.

Conclusion 13

As part of the skills and needs assessment, it came to the fore that the organisation needs to provide descriptive information about the types of self-care strategies that advocates employment and the organisational settings they work in and to examine the relationship between organisational support and the use of self-care strategies by forensic social workers in their service.

3.5.4.14 Working environment

The respondents were asked if exposure to a working environment characterised by sexual abuse and legal processes had influenced them (positively or negatively) as social workers. The following aspects were mentioned by the respondents as obtained through data saturation:

- It has motivated me to make a difference in the life of children.
- Personal growth has taken place.
- I am frequently tired.
- I enjoy the work setting and especially enjoy working with children.
- It has created more awareness of dangers and shortcomings of the system.
- I am more self-aware and need resources and interview tools.
- I have already experienced both burnout and compassion fatigue.
- I have become a stricter social worker.
- I have gained more of the skills required in forensic work.

All of the respondents in this study reported the use of self-care resources in dealing with their work: these were on cognitive level (changing how they think about things), physical level (using body and senses), spiritual level (relying on their religious beliefs or spirituality), social or recreational level (using friends, family, or creative recreational activities as outlets), verbal level (putting into words the painful details and intense feelings that they experience).

Common themes emerging from the data analysis of open-ended questions when asked what could be done under specific strategies such as supervision, resources, debriefing, training and team building and multidisciplinary work, were:

- **Supervision**

The respondents indicated that they needed supervision in their working environment, where a supervisor provides evaluation and direction of the services rendered by the social worker to promote competent and ethical services to clients through the continuing development of the social worker's knowledge and the application of

accepted professional social work knowledge, skills and values.

- **More resources**

Resources were indicated as needs in the working environment of the respondents. They indicated that they had witnessed a sharp rise in complex cases and have in recent years refined the criteria to reach out to those with more complex needs. As work is becoming increasingly more intensive and resources are shrinking, their caseload is becoming harder to manage. Welfare reforms (due to economic recession, for one) have increased their workload significantly. Added to this, the amount of administration they are required to do and the length of time they are expected to spend in the office or on meeting targets is steadily increasing, so it would be both helpful and certainly supportive to know how other social workers in other working environments are experiencing and managing these issues.

- **Debriefing, training and team-building**

The respondents indicated that they needed debriefing, training and team building. Debriefing should assist them with ventilating feelings and getting support with regards to working with sexually abused children. One respondent indicated that training on a regular basis was needed to keep up to date with the most relevant information pertaining to the field in which they work.

- **Multidisciplinary team work**

The respondents mentioned that they needed to work in a multidisciplinary team. Various role players are to keep in contact and have regular meetings with one another. According to the respondents, there is evidence that wherever integrated social and legal services do exist, legal issues tend to be prioritised. This has implications for social work care and the holistic identification of need. This must be addressed.

3.5.4.15 Needs in current employment or working environment

Common themes emerging from the data analysis of the open-ended questions regarding the needs in current employment and working environment of social workers reflected the following:

- Administrative time

The respondents indicated that they needed more administrative time. It was reported that they had limited time in which to do administrative tasks, especially since assessing allegations of child sexual abuse is a time-consuming process.

- Support

Respondents indicated that they needed more support at their current place of employment. They identified support as being of an interpersonal and administrative nature in conjunction with guidance with reference to cases dealt with in the past.

- Training (legal aspects, new Children's Act)

Respondents indicated that they needed more training, especially regarding legal aspects and the most recent information regarding the new Children's Act. New information and research reports regarding child sexual abuse are often released by academics, and social workers feel the dire need for training in this regard.

- More social workers

Respondents noted that more social workers should be appointed due to the current overload of cases.

- Opportunity to voice an opinion without being summarily judged

The respondents indicated that they needed opportunities to voice their opinion without being judged. They need a podium from where they can share and discuss their opinions completely confidentially, anonymously and without prejudice, which means that they can communicate with colleagues with the

assurance that they can discuss anything they want to without being prejudged.

- Acknowledgment and appreciation

The last theme that was captured was the fact that respondents indicated that they needed acknowledgement and appreciation. One respondent mentioned that acknowledgement for work that is being done was desperately needed; while another felt that appreciation should be shown by means of incentives.

3.5.4.16 Supervision versus professional support

Respondents were asked to give feedback regarding existing supervision practices and to indicate whether they received supervision or monthly professional support. The specific differences between supervision and professional support are described by the generic scope of supervision in social work over professional support in the working environment. The general feedback was that a social worker is responsible for making significant decisions on what he or she does: the purpose, functions and role, and for making commitments and decisions that require the expenditure of significant supervision. Social workers have a significant, external focus (on the world outside the organisation) and therefore they have a more internally focused responsibility for implementing the most appropriate decisions. Once a decision is made concerning what is to be done, social workers play a significant role in deciding how to do it and how to achieve the objective established by the decision. For this, a process of supervision is needed.

Several social workers have noted that support is an important factor that mediates the demands of stress. Support has been defined by the respondents as “the degree to which the environment makes available resources relevant to the demands made upon the system”, and “a resource that helps us cope with job stress through supportive relationships with others”. The professional support systems available in social work can be divided into two categories, namely formal and informal. Formal support involves line management and appraisal systems. Informal support involves support from both inside and outside the social work setting, involving, for example,

colleagues, family and friends.

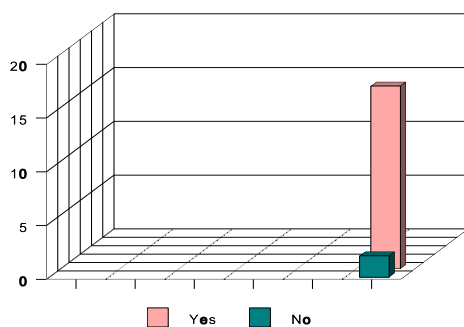
The table below indicates the outcome with regard to supervision and professional support.

Table 15: Response to whether respondents received supervision or professional support

Number of respondents	Respondents' answers
17	Yes, supervision
2	No, only professional support

Figure 11 below is a graphical presentation of what the respondents indicated.

Figure 11: Supervision or professional support



From the above we can see that seventeen respondents (89%) have indicated that they do receive supervision – which is mandatory for social workers in any working environment. It is unknown whether this supervision or professional support is effective and whether the respondents perceive it to be helpful.

The respondents suggest that professional support is sought for two reasons: one is

seeking support for instrumental reasons, namely seeking practical advice, assistance or information as part of problem-focused coping; the second is seeking support for emotional reasons, namely getting moral support, sympathy or understanding as part of emotion-focused coping. Talking about stress-related thoughts and feelings helps social workers to impose a cognitive structure to facilitate integration and resolution of stressful experiences, whereas constraints on disclosure of these feelings can impede these processes.

Participants also felt that disclosure of stressful events and talking about the emotions associated with them in a professional support environment rather than in a formal supervision setting is much more likely to lead to positive psychological adjustment when and if supportive networks are available.

In a holistic viewpoint from previous responses in this research, the following aspects in a professional support context for forensic social workers may be of benefit and may serve as a conclusion.

Conclusion 14

Suggestion for professional support as complementary to formal supervision towards the needs of forensic social workers is needed. More frequent, regular, extensive professional support combined with already established practices of supervision, with better informed and more sensitive practices is likely to develop if more effective support for social workers is provided.

3.5 GENERAL CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to present the information gained from the research respondents with the help of questionnaires and to support the information in the light of existing literature. In the course of the research process, several conclusions were drawn relating to the needs and skills of forensic social workers dealing with sexual abuse.

In general, the following conclusions were drawn from this chapter:

- Social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse need further training in this specialised field.
- Social workers lack support both professionally (administratively) and emotionally and also need more supervision in order for them to counteract burnout and compassion fatigue.
- Social workers assessing allegations of sexual abuse appear to need more specialised training in this specific field of work. Literature indicates that it is necessary to be informed with regard to certain aspects such as, *inter alia*, child sexual abuse dynamics, general communication with children, developmental phases of childhood, as well as compassion that could be obtained through literature, yet even more practically in the practical environment with real children.
- Professional support was another highlight that emerged from this study, where opportunities are created for social workers to vent their feelings with regards to the children they assess.

The following chapter will focus on the recommendations and a synopsis of the skills and needs that emerged in the light of this survey.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher will aim to give a summative overview of the research study. This will involve an evaluation of the research question, the goal and the objectives of this study. In addition, the conclusions that have been drawn will be summarised and possible future research opportunities will be discussed. Limitations that were identified in the course of this study will also be highlighted and discussed.

4.2 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In the context of this study, the researcher used a quantitative research approach. Research respondents were involved by means of the researcher's self-constructed questionnaire.

The central theoretical statement formulated in chapter one was: "If more information regarding experience, content, needs and working methodology for social workers working in a forensic environment were known, training practices in welfare organisations could be directed towards equipping social workers in the forensic field to engage in practices that might lead to a higher success rate of cases going to court and the conviction of perpetrators in child sexual abuse cases."

The general aim of the study was to analyse the skills and needs of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse in order to assist organisations working in the field of forensic social work by improving their support training practices in forensic social work.

A quantitative research approach, using questionnaires with close- and open-ended questions, was followed. In Chapter 3, the result of the empirical study, that is the

data analysis of the questionnaires, clearly revealed a profile of the needs and skills of the participants.

The aim of this study was achieved by achieving the following objectives as stated in Chapter 1:

- Objective 1:

To undertake an in-depth literature study to explore the theoretical aspects of the field of forensic social work with emphasis on child sexual abuse.

This objective was met in Chapter 2 and with some literature control in Chapter 3. The researcher completed an in-depth literature search of current literature, showing how different authorities in the field perceive forensic social work.

- Objective 2:

To conduct an empirical study by means of collecting evidence through a self-constructed questionnaire in which the skills and professional needs required for training in the applied field will reflect.

The empirical data were collected by means of the researcher's self-constructed questionnaire and with participants from four welfare organisations dealing with forensic practice. Ten participants completed the questionnaire. All the participants work and reside in the Western Cape.

- Objective 3:

To analyse and describe the data gathered by means of conclusions after data analysis.

The researcher identified various aspects and drew conclusions from these by comparing said aspects to applicable literature. The conclusions were confirmed in instances where "trends" were clearly pronounced. Some small differences were of little significance, although they may prove to be more significant if they show real consistency. The same type of questions worded from different angles elicited similar answers, for example expectations regarding training and support. Many impact measurements of this assessment were not "statistically researched" but rather

amount to a survey making statistical analysis inapplicable. The conclusions are thus a reflection of the needs and skills needed for social workers and will be presented as such.

- Objective 4:

To draw conclusions and formulate recommendations to assist the social work environment (welfare organisations, social workers and higher education institutions) at supportive training and professional development in the field of forensic practice.

In Chapter 3, the researcher presented the results of the survey, which analysed the needs and skills required by forensic social workers in practice. The results were divided into various themes and subthemes, with conclusions that set out possible guidelines or recommendations for training purposes and can be reflected as follows:

Assuming that the skills and needs analysis identifies more than one training need, the training manager in collaboration with management, prioritises the training based on the urgency of the need (timeliness), the extent of the need (how many social workers need to be trained) and the resources available. Based on this information, the training manager can develop the instructional objectives for the training and development program. All three levels of needs analysis are interrelated and the data collected from each level is critical to a thorough and effective needs assessment.

The purpose of a training needs analysis is to identify performance requirements or needs within an organisation in order to help direct resources to the areas of greatest need, those that closely relate to fulfilling the organisational goals and objectives, while at the same time improving productivity and providing quality products and services.

The needs analysis is the first step towards the establishment of a training and development programme. It is used as the foundation for determining instructional objectives, the selection and design of instructional programmes, the implementation of the programmes and the evaluation of the training provided. These processes form a continuous cycle that always begins with a needs assessment.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

Almost half of the respondents do have specialised postgraduate training in social work. According to the literature in Chapter 2, basic social work training is not adequate in order to assist social workers in the field of forensic practice. Although the percentage (47,3%) may reflect an eagerness for continuing professional development, the ideal situation would be to ensure that all social workers working in forensic practice actually do get specialised training in this field as a minimum requirement.

Work experience reflects skills that are personal abilities and talents that help social workers carry out work-related tasks. Many skills related to social work are somewhat broad, including good communication, and problem solving. Depending on the environment at issue, though, skills can be much nuanced. Forensic social workers need a unique set of abilities different from those that are typical of, for instance, probation workers, community workers, school social workers and play therapists. Many job opportunities in the field of forensic practice set out the skills required for the specific type of social work, and job seekers also typically list their relevant qualifications in their applications. General lack of experience in this regard may jeopardise the specialised field. Literature in Chapter 2 indicates that this may lead to high degrees of burnout and compassion fatigue among forensic social workers. The reality is that most social workers applying for these positions may actually not have the required experience. A solution may then be that a personal development plan in the organisation may counteract lack of experience.

The primary focus on the roles forensic social workers fulfilled in previous positions is on counselling, which indicates that core competencies in counselling do exist and can be integrated with already acquired competencies.

It was evident that a combination of therapeutic roles and forensic roles is found in the forensic practice environment. The reality of time management needs to be

evaluated. It should also be established whether social workers in forensic practice have sufficient time and administrative back-up to engage in any form of therapeutic context. Training practices should therefore also include a synergy between therapeutic intervention and forensic roles up to a point where both therapeutic intervention as well as forensic practice will synchronise in the best interests of the child.

A vast majority of respondents felt that they did actually have adequate skills to conduct assessments of child sexual abuse. Training with regard to different issues in the field of their working environment seems to be of bigger importance than needs in the field of sexual abuse.

Despite the fact that proper assessment of allegations of child sexual abuse – whether therapeutically or forensically – requires in-depth, specialised training, it however appears that social workers still lack the quality continuous training that is needed. According to literature (Stutterheim & Weyers, 1999; Roberts & Brownell, 1999), training needs to be in-depth, focused and specialised. A one-day course in child sexual abuse or forensic interviewing cannot truly equip social workers with adequate knowledge when they have to assess a high profile case and testify as expert witness in a court of law. In its guidelines for investigative interviewing in cases of alleged child abuse (1997), the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) states that “investigative interviewing in cases of alleged abuse requires specialised knowledge”.

Social workers in forensic practice urgently need a wide range of tools to address the variety of assessment challenges that they daily encounter in practice. The British Association for Play Therapy (BAPT) (2012) indicates that no assessment may take place if the social worker does not undertake the assessment of the children using various play therapy assessment tools, depending on the needs of each individual case.

Adequate knowledge is required in order for the professional to present factual

information in court. The quality of forensic assessment reports for court depends heavily on the very procedures and tools relied upon by the social worker.

Training in the form of continuing professional development is pivotal to social work forensic practice in providing the structure and support for social workers to develop their capabilities throughout their careers; to update, extend and deepen knowledge, skills and analytical thinking to deal with increasingly complex and specialist work and to develop professional identity and confidence in the field of forensic practice.

A list of the innate resources social workers must have at their disposal in order to meet emotional needs include:

- The ability to develop complex long-term memory, which in turn enables social workers to add to their innate knowledge and to learn on an ongoing basis;
- The ability to build rapport, empathise and connect with others in their working environment;
- Imagination, which enables them to focus their attention away from their emotions, to use language and to problem solve more creatively and objectively;
- Conscious, rational minds that can check out emotions, question, analyse and plan;
- The ability to “know” – that is, to understand the world subconsciously through metaphorical pattern matching; and
- An observing self – that part of social workers that can step back, be more objective and be aware of themselves as unique centres of awareness, apart from intellect, emotion and conditioning.

From the research, the specific strategies were suggested as coping strategies for social workers. These needs ought to be incorporated in the training practices of

forensic social workers and include the following as suggested by Smullens (2011):

- Actively address problems. Take a proactive approach – rather than a passive one – to issues in your workplace. Social workers will feel less helpless if they assert themselves and express their needs. If they do not have the authority or resources to solve the problem, they should talk to a superior.
- Clarify the forensic social worker's job description. Ask a superior for an updated description of duties and responsibilities.
- Teach social workers to point out things they are required to do and which are actually not part of their job description.
- Ask for new duties if the first signs of burnout set in. If a social worker has been doing the exact same work for a long time, ask him or her to try something new: a different grade level, a different investigative or consultative territory, a different environment or office.
- Take time off to manage leave. If burnout seems inevitable, take a complete break from work.

As part of the skills and needs assessment, the organisation needs to provide descriptive information about the types of self-care strategies that advocate employment and the organisational settings employees work in and to examine the connection between organisational support and the use of self-care strategies by forensic social workers in their service.

Complementary professional support for formal supervision of the needs of forensic social workers is urgently needed. More frequent, regular, extensive professional support combined with already established practices of supervision, with better informed and more sensitive practices, is likely to develop once more effective support for social workers is provided.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher wishes to make the following

recommendations:

Specialised training for social workers in forensic practice is needed. This should include exclusive practices for forensic social work and concepts and philosophies in social work. Social work practice related to legal issues and litigation – both criminal and civil – having to do with child custody issues, the juvenile and adult legal systems, corrections and mandated treatment will add value to the skills and needs of the social worker in practice.

A general lack of experience in this specialised field (forensic practice) is noted. This may lead to high levels of burnout and compassion fatigue among forensic social workers. Forensic social work practitioners are expected to perform numerous and divergent duties. They provide training, education and consultation to the criminal and juvenile justice and correctional systems, for lawmakers, law enforcement personnel and attorneys. They are required to make diagnoses and treatment recommendations regarding mental status and serve children's best interests. Often, they are also required to act as expert witnesses. Other duties of a forensic social worker are mediation, advocacy and arbitration, and in order to perform these duties, they need experience in this highly specialised field. Exposure to these aspects may be one way of dealing with the all too common lack of experience on the part of social workers.

The primary focus in the roles forensic social workers were required to fulfil in previous positions is counselling, which indicates that core competencies in counselling do exist and can be integrated. A combination of therapeutic and forensic roles is necessary for successful intervention in this field. Training practices should therefore include a synergy between therapeutic intervention and forensic roles.

Despite the fact that assessing allegations of child sexual abuse – whether therapeutically or forensically – requires in-depth specialised training, it however appears that social workers still lack continuous professional training.

Knowledge is needed in order for the professional to objectively present factual information to the court. More than half of the respondents do not possess this knowledge. There is a need for training in this regard. Forensic social workers need to be familiar with the law and have specialised knowledge of social work principles relating to legal issues. Traditional training of social workers, however, has not included familiarity with the adversary process inherent in the legal system, nor has it included issues in the civil and criminal justice system.

Without specialised professional training preparing them to deal with legal issues, social workers can be at a tremendous disadvantage when called upon to give their opinion in court. Social work training programmes should focus on solutions, ranging from requiring course work in legal issues to providing degrees in forensic social work. Some training programmes provide specialisation in forensic social work, often in the form of special short courses.

A high-quality training programme in forensic social work promotes the research and evaluation of forensic social work practice, educates and informs both social workers about the law and lawyers about social work matters. It should conduct research about the assessment, classification and treatment of both adult and juvenile offenders. Good forensic social work training researches mental health issues in the civil and criminal justice systems, and seeks to improve the mental health, treatment and diagnosis of offenders and prison populations.

Social workers should be equipped in finding ways and methods of self-care.

Those who are exposed to burnout need to find ways of communicating their needs regarding their working environment, which include their case load. Burnout can cause permanent damage to a social worker's emotional wellbeing and they therefore need to develop ways to protect themselves.

Social workers need more supervision, guidance, training and adequate support in the field of forensic practice with the strategies suggested below as coping strategies for social workers. These strategies need to be incorporated with the training practices of forensic social workers and are to include the following:

- Actively address problems. Take a proactive approach rather than a passive one. Social workers will feel less helpless if they assert themselves and express their needs. If they lack the authority or resources to solve the problem, they should talk to a superior.
- Clarify the forensic social worker's job description. Ask a superior for an updated description of duties and responsibilities. Teach social workers to point out things that they are required to do that are not part of their job descriptions.
- Ask for new duties if the first signs of burnout set in. If the social worker has been doing the exact same work for a long time, ask the person to try something new: a different grade level, a different service territory, a different environment or office.
- Take time off and manage leave. If burnout seems inevitable, take a complete break from work.

As part of the skills and needs required in forensic practice, social workers and the organisation need to provide descriptive information regarding the types of self-care strategies that advocate employment and the organisational settings they work in and to examine the connection between organisational support and the use of self-care strategies by forensic social workers in their service.

FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The researcher has identified the following possibilities for further research:

- A more extensive study regarding the development of a detailed guideline for welfare organisations to deal with the demands of forensic practice;

- An investigation into the therapeutic value of play therapy in forensic practice;
- A study of the assessment tools required for social workers' use in forensic practice;
- Research regarding contributions of social work to the understanding of law and the legal system, with a special focus on investigating child welfare, mental health, and criminal justice/law interactions;
- Research regarding the establishment of community partnerships with courts and SAPS concerned with the continuous improvement of social work.

4.5 FINAL CONCLUSION

In this research study, the researcher explored the needs and skills of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse. Nineteen social workers under the auspices of four prominent organisations in the Western Cape participated in the study. A quantitative study was implemented by means of data obtained from a survey that the social workers were asked to complete independently.

An increase in child abuse cases in South Africa has made an increasing demand on social workers working in this domain, as they have to provide expert testimony. It is therefore important for social workers assessing allegations of child abuse to be equipped with the necessary skills, tools and knowledge for dealing with victims of child abuse. The researcher comes to the conclusion that there is a lack of support in the form of supervision and training of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse.

Social workers in forensic practice need to provide for appropriate fixed times for the supervisors to reflect upon the *content* and *process* of their work. They need to develop understanding and skills in the work environment; they need to receive information and another perspective concerning their work; they need to receive feedback regarding both content and process; they need to be validated and supported both as a person and as a worker and they need to have opportunity to

explore and express personal distress, restimulation, transference or counter-transference that may be the result of stress experienced at work.

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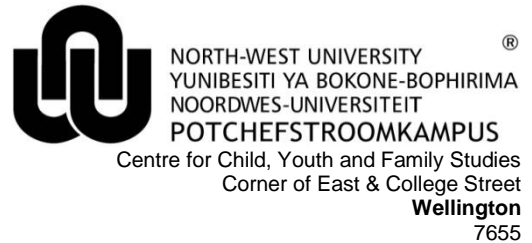
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APPENDIX 1
ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Tel: 021 8643593
Fax: 021 8642654
21 August 2011

ETHICAL AND RESEARCH APPROVAL: R Iffley

The university has approved this study from an ethical point of view for a period of three years commencing August 2011.

The title for this research was approved by the Faculty Board for the Faculty of Health Science on 19 August 2011.

Approved title: A skills and needs analysis among social workers assessing alleged child sexual abuse in the Western Cape

Ethics project leader: Prof P Rankin – School of Psychological Behavioural Sciences

Ethics number: NWU-0011-10-S1

Study leader: Prof CHM Bloem: Centre for Child Youth and Family Studies: Wellington

Yours truly



CHM Bloem

Head: Centre for Child Youth and Family Studies

APPENDIX 2
QUESTIONNAIRE LETTER

Dear Social worker

I am Roché Iffley, a forensic social worker in SAPS and stationed at the Khayelitsha FCS Unit in Bellville. I am currently busy with my Master's degree in Social Work at the North-West University, Potchefstroom, Centre for Child Youth and Family Studies in Wellington. The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain information regarding the skills and needs of social workers assessing allegations of child sexual abuse. As part of my dissertation and empirical study, I would like to kindly ask that you complete the questionnaire which follows.

The questionnaire is brief and will take you only a few minutes to complete. Completed questionnaires are due on 19 October 2010. I will personally collect the completed questionnaires from your office.

All information that is shared remains confidential in that all respondents will remain anonymous.

Please complete the questions below and mark with a cross in the appropriate block or fill in the answer on the line provided.

Thank you
Roché Iffley
Principal Social Worker

APPENDIX 3
QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A
Biographical Information

1. What formal university qualifications have you obtained?

Diploma	B.A (Degree)	Honours	Masters	PHD
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2. Your working experience:

2-5 years	5-10 years	10-20 years	20-25 years	25 years and more
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3. What is your previous field experience?

- Counselling
- Statutory social work
- Forensic social work
- In-take social work
- Probation services
- Employee assistance services
- Therapeutic social work

Section 2

Your skills in forensic social work

4. What is your function as a social worker?

- Therapeutic intervention
- Forensic assessments
- Statutory intervention

5. Have you acquired the relevant skills needed to conduct forensic assessments?

- Yes
- No

6. If your answer is yes, please give a short description of the training you have completed to acquire these skills?

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7. In your own opinion, do you think you have the disposal of sufficient assessment tools to utilise when conducting forensic interviews?

- Yes
- No

7.1 If you answered no to the above, what do you suggest?

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8. In your own opinion, do you think you have sufficient knowledge of the law to be able to testify as an expert witness during criminal proceedings?

- Yes
- No

8.1 If you answered no to the above what do you suggest?

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9. In your opinion, do you have skills for communicating with children?

- Yes
- No

10. If yes, how did you acquire these skills?

- Training
- Previous work experience

Other:

Section 3

11. Working in the field of forensic practice focusing on sexual abuse: What are your particular felt needs in this regard?

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12. Social Workers are prone to burnout and need to develop ways of protecting themselves against this (Johnson, 1995:249-250). What is your opinion regarding this statement? If you agree, have you ever experienced feelings of burnout or compassion fatigue?

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13. What do you think will counteract burnout in social workers working in forensic practice?.....

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14. On a personal level, if you suffer from burnout and do not receive any support, what will you do?

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15. How has working in the sexual offences field affected your personal/home life?

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16. How has working in this environment influenced you as a social worker?

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17. What are your personal developmental and emotional needs in your working environment?

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18. What are your needs as a social worker in your current employment?

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19. Do you receive monthly supervision or professional support?

- Yes
- No

If not, what is the reason:

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20. If yes, what are your feelings concerning your current supervision?

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Thank you for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire and being part of this research.

APPENDIX 4

DECLARATION BY LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I wish to declare that, at the request of Professor R. Bloem of the North-West University, I have been responsible for editing the dissertation of Ms Roche Iffley entitled

“A skills and needs analysis among social workers assessing alleged child sexual abuse in the Western Cape”

JJ (Joe) Coetsee

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